ESCAPE FROM DOOM
COMPLETE NOVEL BY John Wilstach

fantastic ADVENTURES

The SINGING SKULLS By DON WILCOX

RIL 25¢
CANADA 30¢

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A mighty good friend to have around!

HE'S up there, high in the sky, a brave, fast-flying little fighter, picking off the enemies of the lumbering bomber below . . . a friend indeed in a great adventure.

In the little emergencies of home Listerine Antiseptic is that kind of a friend —one that looks out for you, watches over you, and pitches in and helps you when you need it most.

Keep Listerine Antiseptic always handy in your medicine kit. There will be countless times when you will be thankful for the quick, business-like way it attacks threatening germs.

For more than 60 years it has been a dependable first-aid in situations where rapid antiseptic action with complete safety was the prime requirement.

Aside from this, remember its wonderful test record in combating colds and sore throat. Tests made over a period of 12 years showed that those who gargled Listerine Antiseptic twice daily had fewer colds and usually milder ones, and fewer sore throats, than non-users.

Yes, indeed, Listerine Antiseptic is a good friend to have around any time . . . doubly so in an emergency.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., *St. Louis, Mo.*

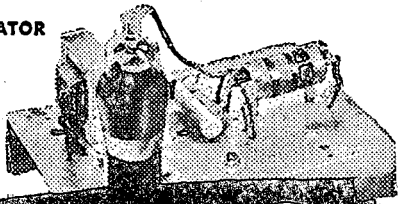
LISTERINE
ANTISEPTIC

THE DELIGHTFUL FIRST-AID WITH QUICK GERM-KILLING POWER

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Radio Servicing pays many good money for full time work. Many others make $5, $10 a week EXTRA fixing Radios in spare time.

Building This A. M. SIGNAL GENERATOR gives you valuable experience. Provides amplitude - modulated signals for test and experiment purposes.



Learn RADIO by PRACTICING in Spare Time

with 6 Big Kits of Radio Parts I Send You

Here's a *practical* way to learn Radio at home in spare time — to train for a good Radio job, or start your own spare time or full time Radio Service Business! You get Radio EXPERIENCE building real Radio Circuits with kits of parts I send. You get solid KNOWLEDGE of Radio, Television, Electronic fundamentals from my easy-to-grasp lessons. You follow the methods that helped hundreds of beginners make $5, $10 EXTRA a week in spare time while learning.

Future Looks Bright for Trained Radio Technicians, Operators

The Radio Repair Business is booming. Profits are large and peacetime prospects are bright. Broadcasting Stations, Aviation Radio, Police Radio, Loudspeaker Systems, Radio Manufacturing, all employ trained Radio men at good pay.

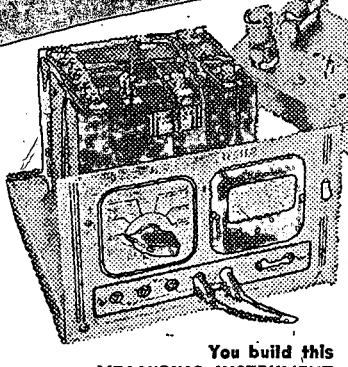
Be Ready to Cash in on Jobs Coming With Television, Electronics

Think of the NEW jobs that Television, Frequency Modulation, Electronics, other Radio developments promise for the peacetime future. You have a real opportunity. I will train you to cash in when amazing wartime Radio developments are released for unlimited peace-time use.

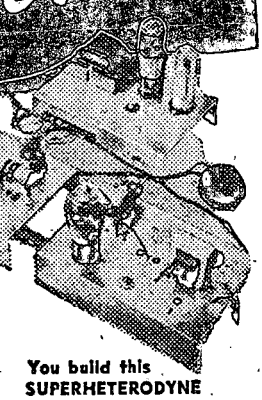
Mail Coupon for Free Copy of Lesson and 64-Page Illustrated Book

I will send you FREE, a sample Lesson, "Getting Acquainted with Receiver Servicing," to show you how practical it is to train for Radio in spare time. And with it I'll send FREE, my 64-page, illustrated book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." It describes many fascinating jobs in Radio, tells how *you* can get started. No obligation — no salesman will call. Just mail coupon in an envelope or paste it on a penny postal.—**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 5BM, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.**

My Course Includes Training In TELEVISION ○ ELECTRONICS FREQUENCY MODULATION



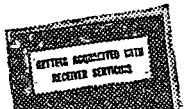
You build this MEASURING INSTRUMENT yourself early in the course — use it for practical Radio work on neighborhood Radios to pick up EXTRA spare time money!



You build this SUPERHETERODYNE CIRCUIT that brings in local and distant stations. You get *practical* experience putting this set through fascinating tests!

BE A SUCCESS in RADIO I Will Train You at Home

Sample Lesson FREE



Gives hints on Receiver Servicing, Locating Defects, Repair of Loudspeaker, I.F. Transformer, Gang Tuner Condenser, etc., 31 illustrations. Study it—keep it —*use* it—without obligation! Mail Coupon NOW for your copy!

GET BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON FREE

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 5BM
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, Sample Lesson and 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." (No Salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name ..... Age....

Address .....

City ..... Zone... State.....4FR

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

All STORIES Complete

ESCAPE FROM DOOM (Novel—55,000) . . . . . By John Wilstach 10
Illustrated by Malcolm Smith
A tiny glass fish that couldn't have been worth more than a few cents—yet more valuable than life!

CAROUSEL (Short—4,000) . . . . . By August Derleth . . . 54
Illustrated by Robert Fuqua
It was naughty of little Marcia to disobey her stepmother; but she liked to play with that nice "man."

THE INCOMPLETE ANGLER (Short—1,700) . . . By Raymond Chan . . . 62
Illustrated by Rod Ruth
The city fisherman got a bite where the natives thought there were no fish—and the rush was on!

THE SINGING SKULLS (Novelet—16,000) . . . . By Don Wilcox 66
Illustrated by Virgil Finlay
Most people can't hear their conscience unless it screams at them. These consciences did scream!

ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE (Short—1,500) . . . . . By Leroy Yerxa 96
Illustrated by Brady
People are funny; and this man was one of the most peculiar—you had to be careful what you said . . .

CHANGE FOR THE BITTER (Short—2,000) . . . . By Lee Francis 100
Illustrated by Margaret Brundage
To be superman of all supermen; that was the dream of these two fugitives on a last battlefield.

DRAGONS BEHIND US (Short—3,200) . . . . . By Richard Casey . . . 106
Illustrated by Julian S. Krupa
The Germans marched into battle with a medal on their chests—a medal of Siegfried and of dragons . . .

LEFTY FEEP GETS HENPECKED
(Short—9,000) . . . . . By Robert Bloch 116
Illustrated by Rod Ruth
Being head man is okay; but there are bound to be complications when you are head man in a henhouse!

THE CONQUEROR (Short—7,800) . . . . . By Charles I. Marks . . 184
Illustrated by Ned Hadley
Nothing left on Earth to conquer; what a sad thing! But wait—what about Mars, for instance?

Copyright 1945, ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations

William B. Ziff, Publisher; B. G. Davis, Editor; Raymond A. Palmer, Managing Editor; Howard Browne, Assistant Editor; Herman R. Bollin, Art Director; Malcolm Smith, Assistant Art Director; H. G. Strong, Circulation Director; H. J. Morganroth, Production Director

We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. To facilitate handling, the author should enclose a self-addressed envelope with the requisite postage attached, and artists should enclose or forward return postage. Accepted material is subject to whatever revision is necessary to meet requirements. Payment covers all authors', contributors' and contestants' rights, title, and interest in and to the material accepted and will be made at our current rates upon acceptance. All photos and drawings will be considered as part of material purchased. The names of all characters that are used in short stories, serials and semi-fiction articles that deal with types are fictitious. Use of a name that is the same as that of any living person is coincidental.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APRIL 1945

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 2

All FEATURES Complete

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK ..... By The Editor 6

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SCIENTIST ..... By Carter T. Wainwright 61

SCIENTIFIC ODDITIES ..... By Lynn Standish 95

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS ..... By Alexander Blade 105

FANTASTIC FACTS ..... By Lee Owens 113

ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS ..... By Rod Ruth & Gordon McLean 114

THE TRUTH ABOUT VAMPIRES ..... By Andrew London 131

GIRL ARTISTS AND THE WAR ..... By Robert Rose 183

HIBERNATION OR MIGRATION? ... By A. Morris 183

INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR ..... By John Wilstach 193

READER'S PAGE ..... By The Readers 195

JET-BOAT OF TOMORROW ..... By Henry Gade 208

Front cover painting by R. E. Epperley illustrating a scene from "The Singing Skulls"
Back cover painting by James R. Settles depicting the "Jet-Boat of Tomorrow"

APRIL 1945

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is published quarterly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 540 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago 11, Ill. New York Office, Empire State Building, New York 3, N. Y. Washington office, International Building, 1319 F Street, N.W. London Office, Grand Buildings, Trafalgar Square, London, England. Entered as second-class matter July 29, 1944, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Subscription $2.50 (12 issues); Canada, $3.00; Foreign, $3.50. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, 540 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago 11, Illinois.

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 2

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES presents a new writer this issue—that is, new to this magazine. He's written a lot of stuff, including three movies (remember "The Plainsman," "Night Hawk," "Undercover Man"?) and just recently, a novel for our new *Mammoth Mystery*. "Escape From Doom" is 55,000 words of mighty fine fantasy, with all the meat to it that any of you could ask for. Wilstach brings a bit of "class" along with him, and we think you'll find his style a mighty solid thing to go along with a mighty solid story.

NOT long ago we asked Don Wilcox to give us a real fantasy, and to forget there was such a thing as an ivory tower. Don's been going highbrow on us (which isn't bad, of course, but he's been doing it in a "literary" sense, and we never did understand what the heck people meant by literary!). However, we take it all back, Don. This one's a fine piece, and it's written with plenty of class. Maybe this one's literachure, Don! Anyway, read it and take our word you won't be disappointed, you readers.

SPEAKING of new authors, we have a brand new one to spring on you. He's Raymond Chan, and he's done himself proud with a little gem of a yarn called "The Incomplete Angler." Yes, you guessed right, Ray is Chinese, and he's been a personal friend of ours for years—and it took a long time to get him to consent to bend his brilliant bean to writing a bit for us! Was it worth it? And how! We think there's an anthology berth waiting for this little one, somewhere.

BY CONTRAST, our contents page this month sports a truly big name. He's just scored another success in the book world with his anthology of weird masterpieces "Sleep No More"—and the story in this issue "Carousel" is slated for appearance in another anthology early this year; which is why we're rushing this into print . . . we want to be first to print it!

AFTER forcing you readers to get down on bended typewriters begging for the return of Lefty Feep, we've finally come through! Yes, he's here again, that beloved jerk, Lefty Feep, master of the quoited quip, the panting paragraph, the murdered metaphor, the dizzy dialogue, the purple plot, the gagging gag and the putrid pun! He's so bad he's terrific . . . we quote youse guys! . . . and in "Lefty Feep Gets Henpecked" he's tearing the terrible all to tatters. (We can knock this story all we want, because we know you'll read it anyway!) Eh? You read it *before* this column? Oh well . . .

HEY, what's this? *Another* new author? Sure enough. Who said there was a war on? Well, Charles I. Marks does okay with his first, a yarn about a conqueror who has nothing left to conquer, so he turns to the other planets. You know as well as we do that's taking in a lot of territory; so you won't be surprised too much by the snappy ending to "The Conqueror," but we have a hunch you'll find it adequate.

WHICH leaves us with three more hot tips for the issue. We'll rattle 'em off fast. You know them all: Leroy Yerxa, with "All Kinds of People" (an O. Henry gem). Richard Casey, with "Dragons Behind Us"—and you can take that literally, that's what the story is about, only the dragons are behind the Germans, and not in the way they had hoped! Lee Francis, with "Change for the Better" which is another war-background story, but you'll forgive us, because it's just too too appropriate—and we wish it were true! Which is the lineup, folks . . .

(Concluded on page 194)

"Sniff, sniff—Texaco No. 40!"

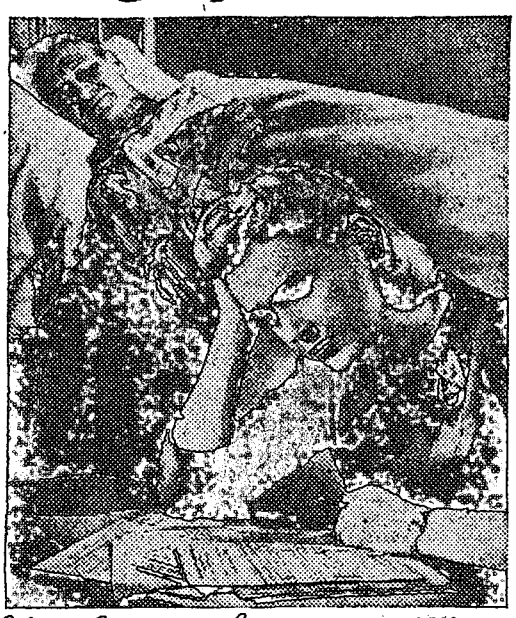
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CASH WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST!

AMAZING NEW

GOLD SEAL POLICY

$1 COSTS LESS THAN a month



✓ PAYS accumulated CASH BENEFITS For Accidental Loss of Life, Limb, or Sight up to $6000.00

✓ ACCIDENT BENEFITS For Accident Disability, policy pays up to $100 a month for as long as 24 months, or up to $2400.00

✓ SICKNESS BENEFITS For Sickness Disability, policy pays, for as long as 3 months, a monthly income up to ..... $100.00 PER MO.

✓ HOSPITAL EXPENSES Policy pays for "hospitalization" from either *sickness* or *accident*, including room at $5.00 per day, to over .. $650.00

All Around PROTECTION!...

Cash for almost every emergency! Benefits that are big enough to be worthwhile . . . yet, this extra-liberal "Gold Seal" Policy, issued by old-line LEGAL RESERVE Service Life Insurance Company *actually costs less than $1 per month.* Here is the protection you *need,* and should have, *at a price you CAN afford.* It is an extra-liberal policy that provides QUICK CASH to pay doctor bills, hospital bills, for medicines, for loss of time and other pressing demands for cash that invariably come when sickness or accident strikes.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION REQUIRED!

No red tape! Fast Service! Policy issued *BY MAIL* at *big savings* to men and women, ages 15 to 69. Actual policy sent for 10 Days' FREE Examination. Write for it today. No cost. No obligation. No salesman will call. Use coupon below. Do it today! Provide for tomorrow!

DON'T TAKE CHANCES! Act Today! Tomorrow May Be Too Late!

Here is a policy that pays, as specified, for *ANY and ALL accidents, ALL the* common sicknesses, even for minor injuries; and pays disability benefits from the very first day. *NO waiting period.* NO, this is not the usual "limited" policy. There are NO trick clauses! NO jokers! NO red tape! You don't have to pay to see this policy. Just send us your *name, age* and *name of beneficiary* and we'll send you the policy for 10 DAYS' FREE INSPECTION. No cost. No obligation. No salesman will call.

The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE CO.
450-G SERVICE LIFE BUILDING Omaha 2, Nebraska

FREE 10-DAY INSPECTION COUPON

The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE CO.
450-G Service Life Bldg., Omaha 2, Nebraska

SEND without cost or obligation your extra-liberal "Gold Seal" $1-A-MONTH Policy for 10 Days' Free Inspection.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....AGE.....

CITY.....STATE.....

BENEFICIARY.....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The 7 Keys to Power alleges to teach," the author says, "All the Mysteries of Life from the Cradle to the Grave—and Beyond. It tells you the particular day and hour to do anything you desire, whether it be in the light of the moon, sun, or in total darkness."

He claims, "The power to get what you want revealed at last, for the first time since the dawn of creation. The very same power which the ancient Chaldeans, Cuthic, Priests, Egyptians, Babylonians, and Sumerians used is at our disposal today."

He says, "Follow the simple directions, and you can do anything you desire. No one can tell how these Master Forces are used without knowing about this book, but with it you can mold anyone to your will."

From this book, He says, "You can learn the arts of an old Science as practiced by the Ancient Priestly Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book." Lewis de Claremont claims. "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them."

He claims, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life: MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these, then this book has an important message for you. No matter what you need, there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need."

OVERCOME ALL ENEMIES, OBSTACLES & HIDDEN FEARS

ARE YOU CROSSED IN ANY WAY?

The Seven Keys to Power, Lewis de Claremont says, shows you how to remove and cast it back.

The Book Purports to Tell You How to—

Gain the love of the opposite sex.
Unite people for marriages.
Obtain property.
Make people do your bidding.
Make any person love you.
Make people bring back stolen goods.
Make anyone lucky in any games.
Cure any kind of sickness without medicine.
Get any job you want.
Cast a spell on anyone, no matter where they are.
Get people out of law suits, courts, or prison.
Banish all misery.
Gain the mastery of all things.
Regain your youth and vigor.
Choose words according to ancient, holy methods.

THE ONLY TRUE BOOK OF SUPREME MASTERSHIP!

This is the Power, He says, from which the old masters gained their knowledge and from which they sold limitless portions to certain favored Kings, Priests, and others at high prices, but never to be revealed under a vow, the violation of which entailed severe punishment.

THE VOW HAS NOW BEEN BROKEN

This book, he claims, shows you the secrets of old which when properly applied makes you able to control the will of all without their knowing it. If you have a problem and you wish to solve it, he says, don't hesitate. Advertisements cannot describe nor do this wonderful book justice. You must read it and digest its meaning, to really appreciate its worth.

GUARANTEED TO SATISFY OR YOUR MONEY REFUNDED

Only a limited number available for sale, so don't wait. It is worth many times its price. If you are wise, you will rush your order for this book NOW.

$1.

MR. LUCK'S CURIO CO., Dept. 702
215 N. Michigan Avenue,
Chicago, Illinois.

This coupon is worth $1.00 to you. Attach a Money Order for $1 to this coupon and we will send you your copy of The Seven Keys to Power—Regularly $2 for only $1.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

SEND NO MONEY!

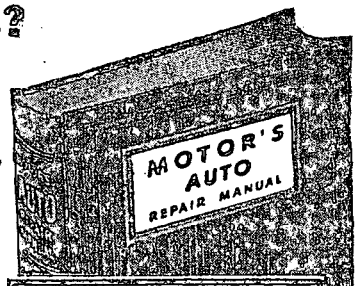
If you wish we Trust You . . . Pay Postman $1 on delivery plus a few pennies Postage. Check here ( ).

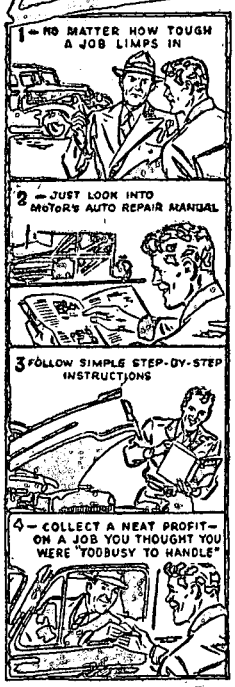
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AUTO REPAIR MEN! Are You Short-Handed for Mechanics?

Are You LOSING MONEY on Work You Can't Handle? —LOSING TIME on Hard-to-Do Jobs?

SEE HOW THIS AMAZING MANUAL IS "WORTH 2 EXTRA MEN" IN YOUR SHOP!





You Can Do ANY Basic Repair Job on ANY Car Built Since 1935!

No need to keep on losing money on jobs you just don't have time, or enough hands, to do! It's like adding "2 mechanics" to your shop when you put MoToR's AUTO REPAIR MANUAL on the job!

With this book on hand you can repair anything from carburetor to rear end—more quickly and easily! Just look up make, model, and job in the quick index in this great book—and go to work! Clear, illustrated instructions lead you step by step.

To make such an amazing book possible, engineer-editors of MoToR Magazine collected and "broke down" 150 official factory *shop manuals* for you, spotted all vital repair information you need, dovetailed it all into ONE handy, easy-to-understand book.

No Other Manual Like It!

This BIG book—764 pages, is 8½ x 11 inches, bound in sturdy fabric—brings you nearly 200,000 service, repair, adjustment, replacement, tune-up facts on every car built from 1935 to 1942. More than 1,000 cut-away photos, diagrams, drawings show you exactly WHAT to do, HOW to do it! Used by U. S. Army, trade, technical schools, thousands of auto servicemen.

The PARTIAL Table of Contents shown here can only give you an *idea* of all the thousands of jobs this book covers. Hundreds of "war-timely" pointers on maximum mileage and performance with minimum fuel consumption. Full wheel alignment data to prevent tire waste and wear.

SEND NO MONEY

Just mail coupon below—*without money!* When postman brings book, pay him nothing. First make it *show* you what it's got! Actually try it out on a few extra-tough jobs. See for yourself how its quick index, easy instructions, and clear pictures can save you time, trouble and money—how the book can *pay for itself* the first few days you use it!

Unless you agree this is the greatest time and work-saver you've ever seen—return book in 7 days and pay nothing. Mail coupon today! MoToR Book Dept., Desk 69B, 572 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Nearly 200,000 Service and Repair Facts on All These Makes:

American	Dodge	Nash
Bantam	Ford	Reo
Auburn	Graham	Oldsmobile
Austin	Hudson	Overland
Buick	Hupmobile	Packard
Cadillac	La Salle	Pierce Arrow
Chevrolet	Lafayette	Plymouth
Chrysler	Lincoln	Pontiac
Cord	Lincoln	Studebaker
Crosley	Zephyr	Terraplane
De Soto	Mercury	Willys

764 pages; 50 pages of carburetor text, charts, illustrations, covering all models.

Over 500 charts, tables covering important specifications, clearances, measurements, arranged in handy form, including: Tune-up Chart; Valve Measurements; Compression Pressure; Torque Wrench Reading; Starting Motor; Engine Clearances; Main & Rod Bearing Journal Dimensions; Generator; Clutch & Brake Specifications; Front End Measurements, etc.

Detailed, pictured instructions on Engines; Electric, Fuel, Cooling, Lubricating Systems; Transmissions; Wheels; Front Ends; Universals; Rear Ends, etc., etc.

FREE 7-DAY OFFER

Same FREE 7-Day Offer Applies on MoToR's TRUCK REPAIR MANUAL

Covers all types Gasoline Engines; Diesels, Hesselmans, Fuel Systems, Governors, Lubrication, Ignition Systems, Starters, Generators, Clutches, Transmissions, Axles, Torque Dividers, Transfer Cases, Brakes, Steering, etc. Check box in coupon at right.

MoToR

Published by MoToR, The Leading Automotive Business Magazine. MoToR's manuals assure high standards of repair work.

MoToR Book Department, Desk 69B, 572 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.
Rush to me at once: (check box opposite book you want).

☐ **MoToR's AUTO REPAIR MANUAL.** If O.K. I will remit $1 in 7 days, and $1 monthly for 4 months, plus 35c delivery charge with final payment ($5.35 in all). Otherwise I will return book postpaid in 7 days. (Foreign price, remit $7 cash with order.)

☐ **MoToR's TRUCK REPAIR MANUAL.** (Described at left.) If O.K. I will remit $2 in 7 days, and $2 monthly for 3 months, plus 35c delivery charges with final payment ($8.35 in all). Otherwise I will return book postpaid in 7 days. (Foreign price, remit $11 cash with order.)

Print Name ..... Age.....

Print Address .....

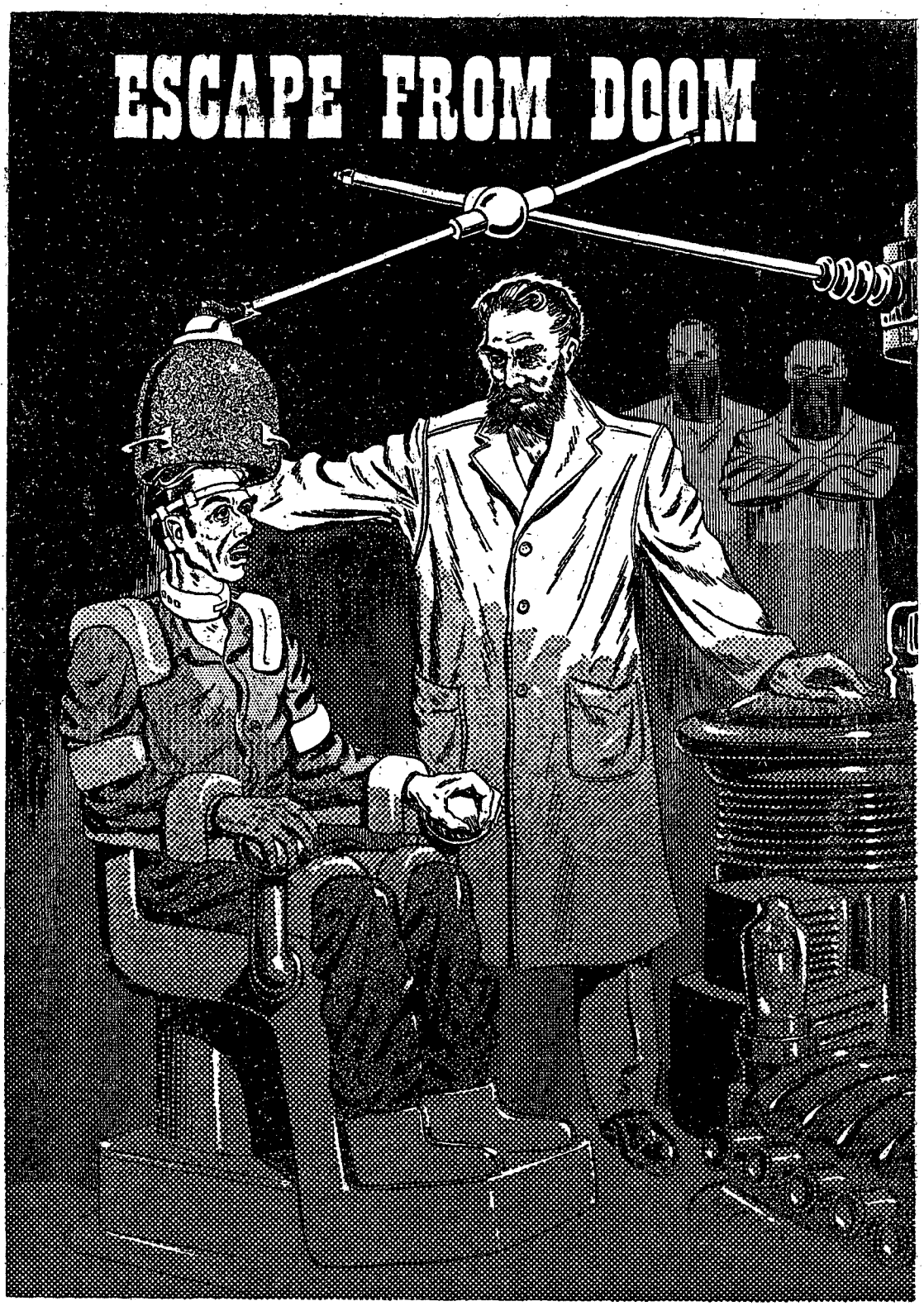
City ..... Zone No. (if any).....

State ..... Occupation.....

☐ SAVE 35¢! We pay postage if you ENCLOSE full payment. (Check, M. O.) Same 7-day return-refund privilege.

Buy War Savings Bonds and Stamps regularly.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BY JOHN WILSTACH

COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

IT WAS only a pretty little glass fish—but there was great danger somewhere behind its innocence

CHAPTER I

The Warrior Returns

CAPTAIN DOREN GRAHAME sat silent and morose in the seat assigned him in the big transport plane, nearly all the way from the Coast to within half an hour's flying distance to an airfield somewhere on Long Island. On the ship was a Public Relations army officer. The latter had tried to get him into conversation, with a view toward publicity. Doren proved non-helpful. The Purple Heart he had won was hidden under his shirt. That there was a silver plate in his left arm, just below the elbow, he also kept to himself. In his nervous and highly strung state Doren Grahame was insistent upon avoiding any of the old ballyhoo. All the heroes he had known were dead.

He grinned sourly, glancing out at

Doren watched the preparations being made . . . would everything work out as planned?

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the driving rain and gathering dusk. Well, he was partly dead. Parts of him —the generous youth, the inspired spirit, all the verve and desire for action—he had taken to the Solomons and were now buried with the men in his bomber crew he had landed at Henderson Field. The slow hospitalization had drained his vigor. What he wanted was chunks and hunks of quiet and peace.

Some of the senior officers on the transport brightened up. They buttoned their uniforms, adjusted their headwear. There would be camera men and reporters at the army air field. Katherine, thought Doren, would be able to get a pass and be there waiting. She always, he remembered, was able to get what she wanted. She had beauty and influence. An unbeatable combination.

Doren remembered the letters he had received at the hospital from the girl to whom he had been engaged—was it only two years ago? He had aged twenty, he felt, during that time. Those chatty brittle-bright notes had told him little save of opening nights, parties afterward at the Stork Club, Morocco. Or yes, Wednesday and Friday afternoons a few hours on Red Cross bandages. Several nights a week a hostess at the Stage Door Canteen, serving the soldiers and thus being oh so very patriotic.

There had been something pleasant yet impersonal about those letters. Still, Doren had wired her of his arrival. He knew that he was suffering from nerves, not thin but quite exposed. He might be doing Katherine an injustice. After all, had she been any different when he had left for training?

Darn what the doctors called the adjustment period. All that was needed was blessed forgetting. Easy to talk about, harder to attain.

An order was snapped to secure belts. The transport circled the field, then went into a slow steady glide toward an easy landing.

Lights went on, bright, dazzling. Doren sat where he was and allowed the others to ascend before him. He wandered out with the crew. Those who had passes were held back by a long rope. Nothing stopped the reporters. Nor photographers.

"We're looking for Captain Grahame," said a middle-aged journalist.

"Hope you find him," growled Doren. He ducked toward the entrance, after a swift glance had tightened something inside of him. Katherine hadn't come to meet him. Absently he showed his papers to a sergeant at the gate. Then he was through, and into a taxi. "I'll give you directions after we get through the Holland tunnel. First, stop somewhere near there at a good bar. I need a double Scotch, with a triple for a chaser."

The driver grinned. Okay, Captain. Given the technical terms, that driver could have written a swell article on jitters as I've observed 'em, and the forms they took. This passenger looked as if he had tasted something bad, a long time back, and wasn't able to get the taste out of his mouth.

IN THE bar Doren gulped a double Scotch. Then he telephoned to his bachelor quarters in an old brownstone front on the upper west side. No one awaited him there except old Tompkins, whom he had inherited along with everything else, when his parents had been killed in an automobile smash-up.

"Hello, Tompkins."

"Is that you, Mr. Grahame, sir? It seems years since I've heard your voice. Do tell me you will be home for dinner."

"I'm afraid not. How is everything?"

"If you mean your tropical fish, sir,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I've kept up your hobby, and you'll be surprised; it is just as if you'd never been away."

Doren laughed, a bit hysterically. Here was something to come back to—beautifully colored fish! Oh, he would be glad to see Tompkins, but he was hardly a contemporary.

"If a reporter calls, say I'm out of town. I'll come in the back way, later in the evening."

"Very well, sir. I've been waiting for you a long time, my boy."

"Thanks for your loyalty," said Doren.

He hung up, realizing cynicism was cheapening his own feelings. Fish indeed. Tompkins was not to be looked upon with contempt just because he received a salary. Such would be the attitude of a snob. Doren had never been one. It was the hurt of Katherine not being there to meet him that had soured his viewpoint. A feeling possibly intensified by the drink.

Once again he took up the receiver. He remembered Katherine's telephone number all too well.

"Is Miss Katherine Wiswell at home?" he heard himself asking, in a voice that sounded cool enough.

"Who is this calling," asked a voice strange to him, in stilted, high pitched tones, a parody of the well bred, that doubtless belonged to a butler.

"Tell her Doren Grahame."

"Just a moment, Mr. Grahame."

Humph. That turtle, he thought, hasn't been overhearing much about a Captain Grahame, that's certain.

Then he heard Katherine's warm voice: "Darling, is that you?"

Her set threw "darlings" around like matches, and the word meant just as much and gave the same heat.

She was so sorry: "The Red Cross, you know, my dear." But there was an opening tonight, a new musical, and afterwards they could dance. She had a ticket for him, and a table for six had been engaged at the Stork Club. Be on hand a bit before eight o'clock. She must rush now.

Doren spoke carefully. "I shall be there quite a bit before eight. I wish to see you alone for five or ten minutes. That isn't very much to ask, is it?"

"I don't mean to be inconsiderate," she said plaintively. "You returned soldiers are so—shall we call it greedy?"

"Perhaps we think we deserve the best," replied Doren, and his words came thin and taut. "Five or ten minutes then, darling. Be seeing you."

The sweat was pouring down his face as he left the phone booth, though it was a cool spring day. Nerves, hang 'em. But greedy . . . what a word!

He put off that other drink until he arrived at the Yale Club, on Forty-fourth Street. He paid the driver, tipped him well, and then could have hugged the man at the door because he recognized Grahame after two years—greeted him with a smile and a cheerful word about enjoying his furlough.

Inside, the club was rather empty. All the fellows he had graduated with must be doing something. An old waiter, too, remembered him, almost patted him on the back. This might be artificial warmth but it felt good.

AT SEVEN-THIRTY Doren taxied to the great apartment building off Gramercy Square where the Wiswells had, as a town residence, a two-floor apartment, with how many rooms, he had forgotten and didn't care.

He was ushered into a sitting room, all in blue and ivory, displaying the good taste of a well known interior decorator.

Katherine didn't keep him waiting long. She came in with that model

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

swing, upen her toes. Her arms were extended. She turned quickly so that his kiss caught her upon the cheek. So that was how it was? Might have known, by the previous signs.

"My dear Doren, so you really are back."

"Yeah, and I'm learning just what *back* means. It means, in some cases, that you have become 'way back. Things have changed. Kate, you look the same. Those wonderful green eyes, the auburn hair with gold in it, and I bet you can look up that slow way when you are dancing with a fellow so he hates to let you out of his arms. But I've been too long out of the picture. There's been a colonel, cutting up a desk with his spurs, or a lieutenant commander who gets away from a shore patrol now and again. I've become a *back* number."

"Oh, Doren. Why, how would it look . . . returned hero—oh, we read all about it in the papers—jilted by girl he thought was waiting for him?"

"I see," he said, and there was dust in his throat, "you were going to do it the slow and easy way—which wouldn't make you look bad. You might have put a little more acting into the job. I wouldn't have been so very hard to deceive. But I'm not going along—not an hour—on pretense and small favors. Explain it any way you wish—after a time. Play the poor, neglected society gal whose army hero gave her the gate, if it pleases you. Now you must make excuses for me, if you wish to do so."

"This all seems so crude."

"Not very Noel Coward, is it? But I'm no longer a bright and intelligent creature. Overtones and light gags don't mean a thing to me. I've become a down to earth guy. You are beautiful but you are not good enough for a fellow who has gone through what I've gone through. I may not get it, but I need sympathy and understanding and companionship, all from the heart, not just the old sex game. . . ."

Her face flamed. "I thought from your letters, Doren, you were twisted since you came from the islands. I wanted to see that you had a good time, so that maybe you'd change to the boy just out of Yale that I knew and——"

"Darling, let's leave phony love to the crooners."

His voice was husky. He was talking all right, but it was taking something out of him. He stood there looking at her, as her fingers twisted at the solitaire upon her third finger. Then his hand was open to take it, closed upon it until the ring seemed to be biting into his palm.

"This wasn't done very nicely, Doren."

"I've been out where niceness doesn't mean a damn thing," he said roughly; and then he saluted her carelessly, turned on his heel and started from the room. He heard her crying very softly behind him.

Oh, he knew she could turn the tears on and off too. She learned that at the little summer theater. But though he knew himself to be quite in the right, his instincts told him that a girl you once had been crazy about very easily made it appear you were in the wrong. Even that you were some new kind of heel.

It was only when he had reached the street that Doren realized this was like a dreaded operation—and you were glad it was over. He belonged to a small minority—he felt it must be small—that had lost their gals while away fighting. Before he went "home" he'd have to drink a few toasts to those other guys who'd be out of luck. He hoped they'd be keen enough, as he had been, to read the signs in advance. A few toasts . . . Why stop at a few

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—many toasts.

"Come'n, fellow," he heard himself saying, "pick 'em up and lay 'em down."

Talking to himself, eh? That was bad. No taxi in sight. Walk westward until you could flag one and then get around with some guys who'd be a reasonable facsimile of human beings.

CHAPTER II

Directed by Destiny

WALKING westward, Doren knew that he didn't actually want merely to get crudely drunk. That would lead to nothing except a hang-over. Now that he was back he wanted to see things straight and not blame others because of his own bitterness which he must overcome.

Katherine. She was part of the froth of society—changing so often and so quickly you couldn't possibly find her in a fixed position with the compass of loyalty. Don't judge the entire sex by her. And those army doctors . . . perhaps they were right; his left forearm really had lost the fine steadiness and strength it once had possessed; his nervous reactions, through tests, had proved to be untrustworthy; when they said he would never fly again, in the service, the medicos had disregarded him as an individual. It had to be that way, of course. Yet where did that leave him? He was utterly unprepared for the role of non-combatant. Better to have died with Stan and Dick and Texas Jack, and his other comrades.

Readjustment. He smiled grimly. Why, he was hardly here at all. All of him worth while was, in spirit, out there with the boys battling and bombing and strafing in the far reaches of the Philippines and the other islands that formed the Japs' shield of defense.

Oddly, Doren didn't have any desire for a substitute girl to serve as an antalgic. Who was it who had said that woman was her own antidote? A cynical Frenchman perhaps. Better the one about even a rat being wary of a second baited trap. The mere charms of youth and prettiness, masking empty caprice, and a heart that could spell loyalty and say it—but never understand what it meant—must never hurt him again. He was from Missouri on that line from now on.

The evening was one of wandering and spaced drinking. He talked with soldiers, watched them with their girls. He tried to get human warmth, second hand. At one night club on Fifty-second Street he laughed at comics and thrilled at ballads, in a counterfeit sort of way. The war wasn't on for these folks. Only for performers of the U.S.O. like Joe E. Brown and Ray Bolger, who had visited the far bases.

Doren tried to forget himself in the crowd. Impossible. If he sloughed his uniform he had the right to wear for thirty days it might help. Seeing his campaign ribbons strangers tried to question him. He shrugged them off. Dig out memories that had seared and blasted his personality for exhibition? Out of the question.

By eleven o'clock he was tired and took a taxi uptown. He entered a delicatessen on Eighth Avenue. The owner remembered him. He walked through to a back entrance, letting him out on a wide paved alley leading to Central Park West. This had all been a series of back lots with high wooden fences, now cleared away. He counted houses. At the tenth he climbed a back porch and let himself in with a key.

You never knew. The Public Relations officers would be furious. They'd thought he was on leash, a hero to be displayed for morale reasons and pub-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

licity. A reporter might be waiting outside. The heck with all that.

He called from the back hallway.

"Tompkins. Tompkins. Are you there, old chap?"

A SERIES of lights went on. He went toward the front of the house, then walked upstairs, with only a glance into the front parlor, Victorian and boroque, with furnishings he had never changed. Doren opened the door to his own quarters, second floor back. Tompkins stood there, a half smile on his thin face. Hesitantly he limped a step, took the outstretched hand.

"Hang it, Tompkins, forget you are an employee. You're the only friend I've seen since I got in. You're a wreck of the first world war—I'm a castaway of this one."

"You'll get over it, sir. You do look thin and peaked. I've been making excuses to reporters and photographers through the front door, with a chain on it."

"Thanks. Morale must struggle along without me as an exhibit. At the R.F.C. centers in England they fine a bird who is interviewed or gets his mug in the papers. Quite right. There's something in that understatement stuff, old fellow. I hate the hoopla."

Doren gazed about the room, rather two rooms, with folding door connection, now open. At the back was his bedroom and bath. This was a comfortable sitting room, book cases on one side, broken by an old fashioned fireplace and a large hearth. On the side against the west wall stood two long glass cases, filled with tropical fish; there was an automatic inlet for fresh water, outlet for stale. The fish were asleep now, deep in the long grasses and odd plants that grew in the pebbles and dirt at the bottom.

"I've fed 'em, kept up the collection with all care, sir."

He pressed a button on the wall. Golden lights lit up the interior of the cases.

Tompkins sighed. "I've been stealing my wages, really."

He spoke with a nice British accent, with nothing of the Cockney in it.

"You could have had a pension, as sergeant-major of that regiment of Lancers, had you applied. You helped make the world safe for another generation of Huns, to start all over. . . . Don't ever thank me, please."

"No, sir. You need rest, if I may be so bold as to suggest it."

"Yep, I am frayed around the edges. Good night, old friend. And you can bring a pot of coffee and the rest of a breakfast to me in bed. I'm going to coddle myself."

Coddle himself indeed, he thought, after Tompkins had left. Sure, if he could only get one good night's sleep without those nightmares. He would be off on that fatal mission again. The one in which Stan and Dick and Texas Jack had been killed and he had brought his bomber home on a wing and a lot of guts, his shattered left arm bleeding madly, the co-pilot dead, slumped over beside him.

The others, wounded, had stuck to the fortress instead of taking to the 'chutes, made two sure kills and two probables on pursuing Zeroes—and as he fainted, making a landing. That was the end of the war for him, except for those dreams from which he awakened, dripping with cold sweat.

Tonight—perhaps because he was in the room he had known from boyhood—Doren slept well, until nine o'clock the following morning. He arose, bathed, shaved, and went to the clothes closet for a civilian suit. Everything was as clean and neat as if he had left only yesterday. In the chest he found

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a clean shirt. He tried on a blue serge coat. It was like a bag on him. He remembered, now that he had lost all of twenty-seven pounds.

TOMPKINS had taken that breakfast-in-bed gag seriously. He entered with a tray. Doren thanked him, waved to a chair and the man placed it there. Carefully he laid two morning papers on the bed.

"I see that you are recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross, sir. They found some photos of you when you played rugby at the university."

Doren grinned. "Football, chum. If it hadn't been for Srober of Notre Dame, I might have made the All American. As a right end he had me beaten a mile, the judges all agreed. How long ago that all seems."

"Your uncle Wharton telephoned this morning. He would like you to drop in."

"Humph. Old Frozen Face. Stocks and bonds instead of veins and red blood. I'll first look in at my tailor. But never again will I be prisoned in the office of our financial wizard."

It was odd perhaps, but Doren dressed in his uniform and left the bed chamber without glancing at the newspapers. He left word with Tompkins that he would be home for dinner at six, if not before. A stop at the tailor, off Fifth and Forty-first, and then Doren walked east and took the subway down to the financial district centered in and about Wall Street.

Wharton Grahame never greeted anyone warmly. It was not his way. He was tall and white-haired, with heavy, bony features and blue eyes that were hard and expressionless as jewels.

"I'm pleased, Doren, that you returned on your two legs. I'd appreciate the newspaper publicity, but I notice you dodged as much as possible. You look poorly. Why not go up to your Aunt Carrie's in Dutchess County for a rest. She will be pleased, for she is lonely. I seldom can leave the city."

Doren was glad no mention was made of his returning to office work. He had no idea of doing so. His father had left him an interest in Grahame & Grahame, and he had other sources for a comfortable income. More than a bachelor needed.

He agreed with his uncle. Thanked him. He liked Aunt Carrie, thought of her warmly, even though only an aunt by marriage. The telephone call quickly reached Tompkins. Pack trousers and a sport coat, however loose, and all else needful. What about the old car? Tompkins had a card and access to a lot of gasoline. "Tompkins," said Doren, "you are a treasure!"

By two o'clock in the afternoon the long rangy roadster was being driven north by Tompkins, while Doren relaxed in a seat beside him.

CHAPTER III

The Mystery Fish

AS DOREN awakened, the sunlight was making a patter across the floor. He sighed, relieved. Another night without a nightmare of flight and blood and death.

Katherine might have done him a service, he reflected. She was a social butterfly, eager for gayness and the gauds of vanity. He had been the usual college grad, a playboy of sorts. That fellow was done, quite. The future? It was dim, beclouded, but someone different must emerge. To heck with all this Hamlet stuff; it was egocentric, unhealthy. He was up here to rest and to drift, to relax those tight nerves; he had seen enough mental cases to fear becoming one himself.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Downstairs his Aunt Carrie was waiting for him. They breakfasted together in a room glass enclosed on the side overlooking a sloping lawn and woodland shelving to the Hudson.

"I am not going to allow you to be entirely lazy, Doren," she said, with that social chirp in her voice he dreaded. "At eleven we shall go to a War Auction to be held on Mrs. Meadows' estate. You are promised."

Doren tried to smile, using unfamiliar facial muscles.

"I suppose you told her I was an ace, with fifteen sure and three probables. All wrong. I'm not a fighter; I was the pilot of a bomber. The turret-and tail gunners did the shooting; theirs is the credit."

"Don't be so technical, my dear. It is all in the papers."

"Curse those Public Relation officers. They keep box scores, parade heroes as in a show, make the war a combination game and vaudeville performance. If morale can't be built, lacking manufactured glamor, to the devil with it."

"Now, don't be bitter. I see the campaign ribbons, darling, but where is your Purple Heart?"

He swore under his breath. She didn't press further. She had used Tompkins as a messenger, to go to the village. That was like her; she was pleasant but bossy.

MRS. MEADOWS owned about five thousand acres, quite large enough to be called an estate. It reminded Doren of Central Park in New York City, with small lakes flashing through woodland, and bridal paths for horseback riding. The mock Colonial mansion was approached by a lawn big enough to keep several gardeners busy.

In front of it a long wooden platform had been erected. This was crowded with pretty girls, a few sprightly matrons, a rainbow of colors punctuated by a few dark slacks. There were row upon row of cars, and people in front were mostly standing, ignoring the folding chairs.

The auctioneer had his coat off. In front of him was an enormous basket. Those on the platform got into a line. As they passed the basket each person leaned over and dropped something into it. Doren knew it must be money, for he heard tinkling. He saw girls take pins and semi-precious necklaces and throw them in. They pulled bracelets from their wrists, tossed them, too.

"Ladies and gentlemen, these gifts are to be auctioned off, the proceeds to go to the Army & Navy Service Organizations To Aid Ailing & Discharged Soldiers and Sailors."

The auctioneer spoke as if setting up headlines for a newspaper.

Doren's eyes were drawn toward a girl with what at first appeared to be Irish coloring, and the wonderful shining black hair and blue eyes the south of the island has made famous. But her patrician features and lips seemed Continental: that is, he thought, sophisticated and somehow woman-of-the-world, even though she might be only twenty or so years old.

She was in blue cotton. Around her neck, by a thin gold chain, hung an ornament, such as he had never seen before. It was an exquisitely made green fish, about three inches long, gleaming with a golden hue. Strange, oriental, and Central American dwarf fish were his hobby.

As she passed the huge basket the girl bent over it, released her clenched right hand. At that instant he noticed that the thin chain broke and the chain and green-and-gold fish fell into the basket.

She smothered a cry but she did not speak as the auctioneer gently passed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her along. Doren noticed that she flushed. How embarrassing, he reflected, if she must explain the gift wasn't a gift, but only the mistake of a loosened chain?

The auctioneer must have figured time was money. He hurried the people along, and as the last one hurried by, he thrust his hand into the basket and pulled out a gold bracelet.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, what am I bid for this bracelet? It is for the best cause in the world. Do I hear fifty dollars?"

He heard fifty just as a starter. This must be a round up of the very prosperous dwellers in Hudson Valley. The final bids were fantastic.

Doren had a chivalrous impulse. He would bid for the curious fish, restore it to the owner. That would be his Boy Scout's good deed for the day. His smile was wry and lop-sided. The wait was a long one. But finally the auctioneer was displaying the green and gold ornament and chain.

"Fifty dollars," said Doren quickly.

Well, the fish couldn't have looked attractive—or maybe no one wished to bid against an officer (for so he still appeared) wearing a flying insignia and campaign ribbons?

The auctioneer was doing his going, going, gone, routine. His hand came down at gone. Doren stepped forward to the platform. He couldn't see the girl, now. He passed up the money. The fish, suspended by the chain, was handed to him.

JUST then a voice almost screamed, from the direction of a long car that had just pulled in.

"A hundred dollars for the fish. Two hundred dollars. It has family associations. Please—please put it back on the auction block."

The speaker leaped from the seat. It was a young man, and he appeared to be greatly excited.

But Doren had very quietly opened his coat and placed the chain and the fish in an inside pocket of his jacket.

The auctioneer was flustered.

"This auction is for charity, sir, and you are late. Unless the officer who bid fifty dollars for the fish wishes to return it for further bidding, with the return of his winning bid, there is nothing I can do about it."

Doren bit his lower lip. He hated being the center of attention.

"I'll pay another hundred and fifty —meeting that two hundred dollar bid, so the services will lose nothing."

He was pleased that he had many months' back pay in his pocket.

Someone applauded. The newcomer, being beamed at by the auctioneer, looked as if he might suffer a stroke, for his face was livid and little purple veins stood out on his forehead.

"I'm willing to go much higher," he exclaimed chokingly.

The auctioneer frowned. "Here, folks, is an imitation pearl necklace that looks the real thing. . . ."

Doren walked around the right side of the platform, seeking the girl with the violet eyes and the midnight hair. Suddenly he felt a hand upon his shoulder, and a murmured: "Pardon me."

It was the young man who had arrived late at the auction.

"I'm sorry, sir, but this is very important to me. I must have that glass fish. I have on me only three hundred dollars. If that isn't enough you may, in addition, take my check for seven hundred, making a round thousand in all. The fish is a cheap ornament, with no value, not a jewel."

The man was speaking as if after a long run. Doren looked him over closely. He wore side-burns, one thing he disliked, and now he could detect a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

certain clipped characteristic of speech not quite American or British as to accent. He was about Doren's age, with regular features, thin lips, and dark eyes that seemed to possess no irises. He wore a Prince Albert, striped trousers, and patent leather shoes, pointed; this all, to Doren, was against him. Besides the fish belonged to the girl—and she had donated it only my mistake, and failed to get it back through confusion.

Doren grinned. "You are speaking to one who, strange as it may seem, isn't wealthy, but has all the money that he needs. Another angle: There's something very fishy about all this, to make a pun. A young lady would not have donated this ornament for charity if worth so much."

The man's mouth twisted in an ugly line. "She—she doesn't know. But she shall be forced to learn."

"I see. Threats. You didn't strike me as a Good Samaritan. Let's end this conversation."

"Ah, I understand now, sir. Pardon me, I under-valued your sentiments. You desire to return the—er—ornament to the young lady yourself?"

"You know her," countered Doren. "The name, please?"

"Miss Virginia Boriza."

"Thanks. Now let me tell you one thing. I have a prejudice against wearers of pointed patent leather shoes. And men of your age with a Prince Albert and striped trousers, should be shot at sunrise. What I do—or don't do—is none of your business. Finish."

"Trivial, boorish American. If you do not return that fish, to Miss Boriza, your life isn't worth that."

The young man snapped his thumb and middle finger.

At that, Doren laughed for the first time in how long he couldn't remember.

"Why, laddie, you are priceless. My life has become a dreadful bore. Lacks excitement, dash and the old zest. You're very welcome."

"You shall regret those words," exclaimed the other, with conviction.

Doren turned his back, started to go around the platform. There were a number of pretty girls upon it, but now he had more interest than before in Violet Eyes. She had possessed something worth a man's life—unless this Prince Albert creature was insane—and he appeared quite sane if over angry; and yet, certainly, she had no notion of any mystery in connection with it as to value or, more likely, *importance*—or she would have overcome embarrassment and insisted upon the fact that it had slipped by sheer accident into the basket; and so recovered it.

Here was a mystery well worth cultivating.

CHAPTER IV

Lies and Action

AN INSPECTION of the bevy of the females failed to disclose Violet Eyes. Odd, thought Doren; he hadn't seen her leave. That rhythmic walk of hers alone would have attracted his attention. It was strange, too, that she hadn't waited to hear the bids on the green-and-gold fish with the thin gold chain.

He walked along the lines of automobiles, all empty, and then strolled toward the Meadows' mansion. There was an immense porch running along three sides. He saw several servants, in livery; no guests. The front double door was open. Two voices could be heard, conversing in quick slurred French. His schoolroom French was no aid at all. Even native language teachers, he had heard, were stumped by the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rapidity with which Parisians speak.

But one voice he thought he recognized. It sounded very much like the man in the pointed patent-leather shoes, only pitched in shriller anger than when the man had threatened him. Then the voices ceased.

Violet Eyes appeared, alone, in the doorway. She had been crying. At sight of Doren, color deepened in her cheeks.

"You are the Captain. And you have been listening?"

"No, Miss Boriza. I couldn't understand. I came here looking for you."

Her expression changed as she flashed a wonderful smile, and her eyes shot him a grateful glance.

"Oh, how nice. Then we can very readily clear up everything. My friend, Manson Towers, he is too impulsive, too filled with temper. Shall we sit down and I shall explain."

She slipped into a chair, thrusting those model's legs out in front of her, crossed them—but only at the ankles.

"This is what took place this morning, Captain. I gave that fish ornament and the chain to the cause before I realized that I had sworn to my dear mother, on her death bed, that I would never part with that rare family heirloom, handed down from elder daughter to elder daughter for many generations."

Doren stiffened. So she's lying, he thought.

"Mr. Towers used the wrong method in trying to restore the ornament to me. He ever thinks of Americans and money in the same breath. He was wrong. But——"

"Why didn't you bid on the fish?"

"This is a cash auction. I had really no cash at all on hand. But I borrowed some money. I know you are an officer and a gentleman, and will prove generous to a poor daughter of an Irish mother and a Free French Major, in the flying corps."

It all sounded good—it sounded sincere—as she bent toward him in entreaty, the lips half parted, the eyes beseeching, the bosom softly swelling under the silk blouse. Only she was a hundred per cent liar.

Even so the words came from him a bit huskily. "I'm sorry, Miss Boriza, but I watched you as you passed that basket. You did open your hand and put in a little cash, perhaps. *But the chain broke and chain and fish fell into the basket before you knew what was happening*. You were gently moved along, as another took your place, and, embarrassed, you didn't know just how to recover the fish. I don't think you realized it's importance . . . then.

"You are lovely to look at; you held my gaze. That's how I saw exactly what happened."

She sighed.

"After my little lie I wonder will you believe the truth. The truth is that an overwhelming danger exists for me, and for you as well, until——"

"You get back the fish?"

She nodded, waited as if in perfect confidence.

"You will be my friend," she whispered, "my very good friend. There is nothing—nothing at all—I would not do to repay you. Men have found me beautiful but I have ever sought loyalty—the kind that will unhesitatingly trust me, as you must now."

She took his right hand, held it between the two warm palms of her own hands. Doren saw the pulse beat in her forehead and that the lower lip of her mouth, soft and crimson, was trembling.

Very slowly Doren drew his hand from her.

IN ANOTHER time, another mood, she would have been as irresistible

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as her evident expectations. But he was sour on the sex. Katherine's one-two punches had been too recent.

Doren spoke slowly. "I'm a medically discharged pilot. I have no plans, no work. I have what's called small private means. I *had* no interests; now I have one. The fish is important, *why* I do not know; but the mystery intrigues me."

"You seek death?" she asked, sucking in her breath.

"I met it many times in the Islands," he said slowly, "and something like this may be good for my nerves, which are damnedly bad. I need a challenge or I'll go soft. However, I don't believe danger exists for you — not bodily danger, anyway. You and Towers were chattering like a couple of old buddies. I caught *mon ami* (my friend) *affaire du coeur* (an affair of the heart). I know a few French phrases."

"He was advising me to seek you out, to make my appeal an affair of the heart."

"Then this, beyond doubt, is your first failure. I am not fool enough to rise to bait even as attractive as you."

He didn't see her open palm coming, but he felt a sharp pain as it connected with his mouth.

Now she was upon her feet, fairly tingling with anger.

"You, an officer and a gentleman! You, who can't recognize a—a lady when you meet one; you, who take me for a common thing whose feelings and emotions do tricks like clock-work at a master's command. I told the truth, partly for my own reasons, partly to save you from rashly blundering into something beyond your comprehension —something you think will amuse you. Deadly amusement, I assure you."

Doren smiled crookedly.

"Perhaps if you tell me a *third* story I'll find one worth believing."

Her chin went up proudly, and she swept by him as if he might be something that had just crept from the wood work. Out the front door she went, with that graceful almost imperceptible sway in her carriage, and then he was alone, rubbing his mouth.

"First Katherine, then Virginia. I seem to be upon the receiving end," he said aloud, a habit of lonely men. "That must be the Irish in her coming out—those violet eyes and that shining blue-black hair—and what a charming little actress—when she seems to be having her own way."

He walked indoors, found a telephone and managed to get his uncle's place and have Tompkins summoned. He ordered him to get the car out and come over to the Meadows' estate.

"Oil up that old service gat and bring it along. I've been threatened with a popoff twice already this morning. I have hold of something big, by error. I won't let go 'cause I see fireworks and I believe they may be good for my nerves. But I must get the evidence safely hidden for the present and I need your help."

"Very well, sir," said Tompkins, "I'll be right over."

Doren nodded, hung up. It must be nice to be as unemotional as Tompkins. As for himself, he was glad that Miss Virginia Boriza hadn't won. When she had held his hand between her own two palms a thrill had gone through him like an electric shock—and he had needed all his cynicism and will power to snatch his hand away. And those half parted lips . . . to crush his own against them would have been wonderful.

"But once a sucker doesn't mean always a sucker," he muttered testily.

AWAITING the arrival of Tompkins, Doren sought out his aunt, found

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her in the company of Mrs. Lelond Meadows and several other matrons. He asked to be introduced to the hostess of the charity affair. That lady smiled, one of those professionally social smiles she could turn on and off as one would an electric light.

"I met a delightful young lady, Mrs. Meadows, up at your place, a Miss Virginia Boriza . . ."

"The darling. She is my guest, a refugee from France, Captain Grahame. Her father, I think, is a major with the Free French army under General De Gaulle."

"And a Mr. Towers?"

"A distant relative of the girl's. Cousin, I believe. He is not staying with us, but at the Bedford Inn. You must come over one evening and tell us of your exciting experiences."

Doren smiled. He was sure of one thing: either returned fighters were neurotic or the home folks were mostly just that, expecting a man to unfold memories that had branded and seared, for tittle-tattle amusement. He withdrew silently, his rather handsome face a bit too bleak and stern for the coddling and mothering that gave these women a thrill.

He walked toward the main driveway and waited for Tompkins, but he didn't get out of sight of the crowd. The old car came up the road, stopped quickly. Doren motioned for Tompkins to turn. Then he opened the door, stepped in and seated himself beside the driver. Quickly he told what had taken place.

"Now, Tompkins, I figure there is more in this than meets the eye; certainly more than goes into the ear. Lies and threats. I want you to appear to go back to Aunt Carrie's. Then keep right on going—to New York and our home. If you are not followed, while uptown, stop at a jeweler's and have him examine the fish carefully. See if anything is scratched into the glass—a message, or code. Then hide the fish. I don't want to know where it is hidden, at present."

He took out the chain and green-and-gold ornament, passed it to the other, who quickly put it in his own inside pocket. With British imperturbability, Tompkins made no comments, asked no questions.

Doren left the car and watched Tompkins drive off. Just then another automobile swept by, throwing dust into his eyes. He hadn't managed to recognize either the man crouched behind the wheel or his companion. Foolish, maybe, to wait in sight of the visitors, but his nerves easily became jittery. Why conclude his car was being followed? He was allowing his imagination to play him tricks.

In less than half an hour a footman came from the Meadows' mansion. He said that Captain Grahame was wanted on the telephone, very important, an accident to his man.

Doren drew a deep breath, let it go, ran after the footman, passed him and sprinted to the telephone.

"Hello. This is Captain Grahame."

"Your servant, Thomas Tompkins, asked me to contact you. He is outside Bringington, only badly shaken up. But the car has a broken right front wheel, for one thing. He asks, can you come down with another car?"

"Tell him I'm on the way."

DOREN, conscious of what he was doing, went to Aunt Carrie's machine, jumped in and was off. Mrs. Meadows would see that she arrived home, and his aunt had two other cars in her own garage. In twenty minutes he slowed down where a State Trooper stood in the highway. Doren's car was on one side, crumpled in the ditch.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tompkins was seated on the ground, rubbing his right ankle. Doren went over to him.

"I doubt that you want to make a complaint, sir," Tompkins said softly. "A big car almost forced me off the road. I stopped. A chap walked over. In one hand was a revolver, the other held a wad of bills. I was given my choice. Here was three grand, as he called the money, for the glass fish. I could say I had been held up. Either I'd come across, or else—and he pointed the revolver. I said give me a minute—and then I stepped on the accelerator. A bullet went high, sir, and then he plugged my left front tire.

"How it happened I do not know. The wheel seemed to do what it wanted to do. I landed in the ditch. The car keeled over."

"And the fish?"

"Just luck, sir, I found out a few minutes later. A State Trooper on a motor cycle came along. He said a man leaped into the other car upon seeing him, and sped away. What I carry is safe."

"Can you drive?"

"Of course, sir."

"Then take my aunt's car. Bring it back tonight. The orders are the same. Only turn eastward, get off the main roads to New York."

"And you, Captain?"

"I'll get a hitch back in the State Trooper's side car, or hire a machine in Bringington. I want to call on a certain Mr. Towers. Just a few questions. First, I think I'll punch him right in the nose."

"I wouldn't, sir. Remember your left. It is, shall we say, rather useless. It took me years to remember my footwork was gone because of a game leg."

The State Trooper approached with his book. Doren heard Tompkins explaining that the accident was quite probably all his own fault. Good man that, one you could rely on. The book closed, Tompkins limped over to Aunt Carrie's car. He was in and away.

Only a fellow trooper, or a prisoner could ride in the side car, Doren learned. He walked the half of mile into the village, hired a man and an old runabout at the local garage, being charged a most exorbitant price, and made arrangements for his wrecked car to be hauled in for repairs.

The next stop was at the Bedford Inn. Yes, Mr. Towers had been there for some days, but he had checked out that morning.

Back at Mrs. Meadows' place, Doren paid off the man. He sought out his aunt, explained he had to go to the scene of the accident, and had loaned Tompkins her car. She was unperturbed. She would telephone home for another to be brought over. Such was wealth, overcoming difficulties unsurmountable to poverty, thought Doren.

It was three o'clock now. He walked up to the house. If Virgina Boriza, too, wasn't among the missing he was determined to have another talk, a mighty serious one this time, and see if he couldn't possibly get some truth from the warm, easily lying lips of that lovely young creature.

The first glimpse of mere mystery had indeed been intriguing. This was becoming more serious. The man had fired high. Otherwise Tompkins, an old and valued friend, might have been killed. And not for the intrinsic value of the ornament, that was certain.

CHAPTER V

Is It Magic?

VIRGINIA BORIZA, back turned, a light tweed coat slung over her

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shoulders was walking away from the house toward a stretch of lawn overlooking the Hudson. There were big colored parasols and camp chairs. No one was about. Afterward Doren learned a treasure hunt was being organized, five bucks down for each searcher. He overtook the girl, saluted carelessly.

"It is time, darling, for a serious talk."

"Don't you dare call me darling. I'm not——"

"I know something of what you're not. What I want to know is what you are. Sit down," he ordered, and to his surprise she obeyed. "Do you know that a man who works for me was attacked while taking that ornament back to New York? His car was wrecked—he was fired at but not hit, very fortunately. He was first offered a bribe of three thousand dollars. Now that fish isn't a jewel. It has no value *in itself*. Come again, Virginia, and give me the real low-down."

"Low-down?"

"Oh, you understand only book English? The real explanation, let's say."

"I wonder, will you believe me, after my lies to you? I must tell you the truth so you will see how important the magical fish is to certain men. Yes, there is magic connected with it—and do not smile. Have you ever heard of the great Greek, Pythagoras?"

"Wasn't he the bird who started the gag about numbers having properties?"

"Much more than that. He was a great magician and seer, centuries before the Christian era, who finally settled on one of the Greek's islands. He invented a strange language of his own for his disciples, and his secrets were written down in hieroglyphics no one else could read. Some years ago, on the island of Crete, two disks were found, printed on clay with movable type, there being forty-five characters in all. No one, up to this last year, was able to solve the ancient code. When the disks were discovered, lo, this was the magical stuff of Pythagoras, and it had connection with a fish ornament that was found in the vicinity of the disks. The fish, if its power can be restored gives its owner, in a magical manner, *any wish that he utters.*"

"A very interesting fairy tale."

"I feared you wouldn't believe me."

"That brings me nearer to something, however. Just why were you wearing the fish ornament?"

"Just as pearls are brought back to radiant color by being worn by a healthy woman, so the fish—explains the disk—gains power when worn by an unmarried woman."

"I seem to remember, in reading about the Greeks, that they believed in certain particular properties of—shall we say—a virgin?"*

She flushed. "I believe I put it in a nicer manner."

"Remember I've been in the war for two years. Pardon me if I become a bit uncouth now and again in my speech. Now, Virginia, you have that story very pat—as if told to you quite recently. Tell me, when you were chosen as a courier, shall we say, you were persuaded to wear the glass fish to this country? You weren't told, then, all about the magical hokus-pokus?"

---

*These disks are not a figment of the imagination. They were found in Crete, and photographs of them may be found on page 562 of the Nov. 1943 *National Geographic Magazine.*

Pythagoras was as great a magician as Miss Boriza stated. He was the inventor of the magic in numbers, one of the first masters of transmigration—or reincarnation—a seer, a philosopher, and head of a secret cult, after years of study with the priests of Egypt. Biographies of him, by Iamblichus 280-333 A.D. and Porphyry 233-306 A.D. are interesting to students of the occult.

It is known that Virgins were used in ancient Greek rites, and through their lips prophecies came when they were possessed of the Gods. The Vestal Virgins, in Rome and elsewhere, guarded the sacred temples.—Ed.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why do you say that?"

"Because if you had been told, you'd have dived down in that basket, said it was a mistake, and brought up the ornament. Why, if it retained its ancient magical powers, a man could make wishes on how a sea or land battle should terminate—*even which side must win the war!* This would be the most important single object in all the world to you, if you believed in this nonsense."

"You believe it nonsense?"

"I'm like Hamlet: I admit there's lots I don't know. But I certainly can't accept that grown men would try to bribe and wreck and even kill in a belief that magic from long before the Christian era can influence modern men and events. It isn't practical. It tumbles logic and science upside-down. Say, while you wore the gold-and-green fish did you ever make any little wishes—wee ones?"

"Yes, and they all turned out as I had wished."

SHE looked at him defiantly and he had to smile slightly.

"You know why they turned out that way? Because you bear the talisman of beauty. That is a better talisman than any glass fish. Well, I hope it will soon be in a safe hiding place, where it won't be a wishing stone, so to speak, for any of your friends.

"Meantime, Virginia, I can't decide whether you are a dupe or a conspirator. I hope the former, and think so, because you and that Towers bird don't seem to have been turned out of the same kind of moulds. As for his two boy friends who went after the fine old man who works for me, I'd hate to think that all four of you were birds of a feather."

"But again, Captain Grahame, you do not believe me?"

"I think you might have been fed a nice romantic yarn. Let's put it that I do not swallow the story.

"Then believe this: if the fish isn't recovered by its owners you and yours are in dire danger. There are men who will not stop at anything. They are ruthless. Believe that, and don't remember too late, that I warned you. Remember, my mother was born in this country—I am half American."

"How long have you been here?"

"I came in on the exchange ship, last month. My first visit. I was brought up in France, and in North Africa. My father was long stationed in Algiers."

"Virginia, we have met twice, and both times we have been at cross purposes. After this blows over, I——"

She arose and stood in front of him, and she smiled sadly.

"We might be friends, have such good times—after the fish has been returned. Otherwise there is a storm that will never blow over until you are submerged. Goodbye, Captain Grahame."

"If I had that fish here, my dear, I'd hold it tight and make a few wishes about you and me."

She did not smile at his gaiety, but gave him one long last look as if it was all she expected to have left to keep in memory. It made Doren feel a bit uncomfortable. Darn it, far as he knew he wasn't getting ready to go on a journey. Instead he was hardly back from one.

He watched her, the grace and beauty of her, and for the tenth time wondered why he was proving so obstinate.

* * * * * * * * *

DOREN thought, the richer you are the later you dine. A few of Aunt Carrie's women friends dropped in around seven. It was a quarter to eight when the butler made the announcement.

He hardly entered into the social

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chirping. Questions — very personal ones—confronted him. Why had he played around with Virginia Boriza, called for Tompkins to take the dangerous thing he carried back to the city, to hide it and not to tell him of the hiding place?

Didn't this, and sending Tompkins again in the second car, seem a bit like a cowardly passing the buck to a middle aged servant who still limped from a bullet in the first world war?

Had his nerves sapped his manhood?

Was he frustrated because that silver plate in his arm left him no longer a first class fighting man? Or, despite Katherine, had he been weakly drawn to a new flame, like a poor singed moth that hadn't learned a lesson?

This was stuff to cause him to squirm inwardly. Yes, he had ducked a mission. He'd apologize to Tompkins when he returned. Quickly as possible he would resume custody of the talisman,* and assume all responsibility for it until he had cleared up the mystery of why it was so important to certain people. The fairy tale about Crete was a bit too thick to swallow. There must be a sinister aspect to the secret.

Well, Tompkins would certainly be back by ten o'clock, giving him time for a rest and dinner. That would give him plenty of leeway.

With the others, Doren listened to the ten o'clock radio news commentator. Then he excused himself and went out to the garage. No, the car he had borrowed hadn't returned. He couldn't very well borrow a second machine from his aunt.

The head gardener owned an old Chevvy. How about fifty bucks for twenty four hours? The old Scotchman was delighted. Learning there was plenty of gas in the tank, Doren started out for the city, feeling a craven, ashamed, creeping back upon the tail of action.

If anything had happened to Tompkins how could he ever forgive himself?

The Chevvy was speedy enough, but he was wary about going too fast. It was two-thirty in the morning when he turned at Central Park West and parked across the street from his own home. Doren jumped from the wheel. Something was wrong—very wrong. Aunt Carrie's car stood parked in front of his old brown stone front! Where was Tompkins?

Doren unlocked the front door and dashed upstairs. The door leading to his all-purpose room was unlocked. He opened it, swore weakly, and felt tears of humiliation sting his eyes. Thinking of himself, again, instead of the man to whom he'd shifted responsibility: there on the floor, wrists tied to his naked feet, was Tompkins.

The gag, first. The poor fellow collapsed, breathing heavily, but no other sound came from him. His hands and his feet had both been burned; they were raw, blistered, bleeding.

RUNNING to the bath room, Doren got a fine first aid kit. He knew all about burns; half of the minor as well as serious injuries in flying came from them. Then he was down on his knees working furiously, first applying soft cotton waste, then bandaging loosely. Sweat poured from him as, trying to take most of the pressure on his right arm and shoulder, he managed to

*According to authorities a talisman is a charm supposed to benefit the possessor. It is often mistaken for an amulet, which was a *defensive* charm, often with an inscription upon it, worn to fend off sickness and witchcraft. In ancient Egypt amulets were frequently worn in the form of necklaces. The Greeks called such a protective charm *phylacterion*.

Since the Pythagoras charm was to aid its owner toward the realization of wishes, Captain Grahame was correct in calling it a talisman.—Ed.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

carry Tompkins to his own bed.

His hand trembled as he brought a big hooker of brandy, opened the man's mouth, held his head back and managed to get him to swallow some of the fiery stuff. Tompkins coughed, drew a deep breath, then opened his eyes. There was a mad, frightened look in them for an instant. It vanished. He tried to smile.

"Rather rugged going, sir."

"Damn it, I should be flogged. My 'phone is listed in the book. All they had to do was take their time."

"They must have had skeleton keys, sir. I was upstairs only ten minutes—a bit tired, you know—just about to get a bite to eat, when they barged in. But you haven't asked me about the ornament. . . ."

He took a second drink of brandy. None of it spilled this time. A faint color stained his cheeks.

"To the devil with the fish!" Doren cried. "I should have finished what I started, not passed the buck to you. I suppose they tortured you."

"Yes, until I fainted—and fainted again. I heard one fellow say I was old and might have a bum ticker; then they would be out of luck, for I might pass out with the hiding place known only to me alone. There were other ways. They searched everywhere but the ornament is still safely hidden."

"Supposed to have magical powers," growled Doren. "You ask a wish, touching it I guess, and your wish comes true."

Quickly he repeated Virginia Boriza's story. Tompkins looked up at him wistfully.

"Will you let me crawl on my knees into the other room? I want to take a chance. I know about burns; they'll be long in healing."

"I'll humor you. Tell me where it is and I'll bring it to you."

"No sir; I've left a clue for you among your bills, but you were originally quite right: one of us knowing is enough. I'm an old man. You are still young."

Tompkins crawled carefully from the bed to the floor, slowly made his way to the big room. Doren picked up a French telephone from a small table by the bed and reached Dr. Matthews, the family physician, and explained that Tompkins has burned his hands and feet.

In five minutes the strange, bandaged figure crept back into the room. Doren helped him onto the bed. The patient protested, but finally took a third drink of brandy.

Dr. Matthews must have been unaccustomed to calls at three in the morning. It was nearly five before the door bell rang downstairs, and Doren conducted him to the bedroom. The physician unrolled the bandages, softly pulled away the cotton waste.

"When did you burn your hands and feet?"

"About seven o'clock, sir. A brand hopped out from the fire place. I stepped on it, then picked it up with my bare hands."

"Humph. You had very fine examples of second degree burns, my friend, but the way these burns have healed, or are healing, I should say *those burns were inflicted at least five or six days ago*. There was no reason at all to call me from my sleep. The treatment used is working out splendidly."

Doren opened his mouth—closed it. Tompkins' eyes were twinkling and his face bore no signs of shock and pain. But how explain to Dr. Matthews that he had held the ancient Greek fish, part of whose power had been brought back by being worn on the breast of a virgin, and asked that his burns heal quickly!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They healed the equivalent of five or six days in two hours. You couldn't very well say that. Physicians shake their heads and put a man where four sides of a room are padded for saying such things!

CHAPTER VI

Proposal and Disposal

TOMPKINS became drowsy, after the doctor left. Doren murmured a good night. He went downstairs to the other's bedroom, off the kitchen, and fell into a dreamless sleep. He awoke at eight o'clock leisurely made breakfast and took his servant's meal to him, in bed. The man's expression was hurt and shocked. But Doren said:

"Hey, come off of it. You took it for me, 'cause I lost my guts when my left wing became almost useless."

"But this isn't proper, sir."

"Drink that coffee. The grapefruit is an amateur's job, but I hope the three minute eggs are okay. The cigarettes are on the table."

Suddenly Tompkins laughed. Who ever said, thought Doren, that a Britisher hasn't a sense of humor?

With his cigarette, Tompkins explained that he had stopped off in Yonkers at B. Bowbowers, a jeweler and watch repair expert, so the sign said; the fish had been examined under one of those microscopes that are held in the eye, and there was absolutely nothing save the usual carvings of mouth and fins and so on. No tracing, no marks—not a thing to go on.

Doren whistled. "Even with the quick healing of your burns, I still maintain the get-your-wish stuff isn't sufficient. That gag was all right for Aladdin and his lamp. But that a talisman from before the first Christian era could possess any such power . . . This is 1944."

The man in the bed smiled queerly.

"In 1918, my lad, it would have been impossible to imagine Hitler and the consequences of a mad paper-hanger almost succeeding in being ruler of all Europe. After that I'll take a chance on anything."

"You mean anything is possible?"

"Just that. Modern inventions would astound folks of two hundred years ago. Maybe those old magicians of B. C. had remarkable powers that have been *lost and forgotten.* It could be that an intellect and will, beyond our comprehension, was able to give a talisman a force, energy and influence by means unknown to us."

"Why, Tompkins, I didn't know you went in for the occult."

"I've done some reading on it," returned the other modestly.

"Okay. But why was Virginia Boriza persuaded to bring the talisman to this country? Why wasn't it claimed by the owners before the accident of her dropping it into the auction basket and my getting it? *I think someone was supposed to be out front, ready to get it at auction.* He was late. His car pulled in. And he bid a hundred—two hundred—just too late. Why, if this were merely a magical or miraculous ornament, didn't they go about it in a legal manner to establish ownership, get it back in ways honest men would use?"

"I don't know, Captain, but if *you* ever need or want it badly, before any mystery is solved, look at the bills and notes on the hook on your desk and the clue will lead you to it."

Tompkins was out of bed now and dressing. His feet and hands looked pink, as if from sun-burn, but quite healed. Doren tried not to be impressed. But that the other could drive one of the cars up to Dutchess County, the morning after the torturing, was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

obvious.

A last point the servant cleared up. The two men who had broken in, revolvers in hand, apparently were not foreigners but regulation American gangsters.

IN THE Chevvy, and following his aunt's car, with Tompkins at the wheel, a single question harried Doren —could he stand the gaff? Did his doubt explain why he hadn't taken responsibility for the talisman? Was fear lurking, to pounce from the miasma of the subconscious mind?

He considered the wiry little fellow ahead, with his mock-humble manner and Oxford accent. Doren's dad had met him in Flanders in World War I. Obviously once a gentleman, was he doing some strange kind of penance?

On the straight river road Doren tried to cut off his somber thoughts. Think of a pleasant subject, he told himself. Think of Virginia Boriza. There was, he had read, a mental phase of neuroses, *amenomania*—pleasant delusions. Well, her loveliness would do for a start. The poet Keats had written that beauty was truth and truth was beauty. Maybe in his day. But who expected a girl as attractive as Virginia to be telling the truth all the time? Better to ask her for a line of lies to delight him.

On the trip Tompkins thought to stop at the garage in Bringington. The repair boss had found an old bus in a junk yard, bought a wheel to replace the broken one on Doren's car. It was ready to be driven again—at a stiff price. The owner said it would be paid and the car picked up.

He saw Tompkins driving into the grounds surrounding Aunt Carrie's place. Without hesitation, Doren found himself going by, toward Mrs. Meadows' estate. Because of driving right up to the front of the mansion he didn't miss Virginia. Luggage waited on the graveled walk. Then the girl embraced her host. Doren jumped out, put the leather suitcases in the back of his own car. He saluted.

"All ready to take you to the station, miss."

"But, I——"

"I have to see you. Don't bother Mrs. Meadows further. I'll leave you at the train."

"You promise?"

"Word of honor. You know I'm not hounding you, Virginia."

She stepped into the front seat beside him, and they were off in the roadster, just as a big limousine pulled out from the garage.

THE GIRL wore no hat. Her hair was burnished as the wings of a raven. The line from chin to throat was classic. The eyes had all the blue of deepest skies.

Ah, come out of it, fellow! Doren told himself. He sniffed a lilac perfume and tried to remember it came from an expensive bottle. Her shoulder touched his and seemed to burn a hole.

"What do you wish to see me about, Captain Grahame? I'm not going to warn you again."

"Well, there was something in your warning. My man was tortured by two thugs who wanted the fish talisman. They didn't get it. Then he got to the thing, made a wish—and the doctor said his burns healed as of five or six days in less than two hours."

"I told you I had my wishes come true while I wore it."

"You didn't need it. But I'm up a tree. They are a bad lot, those who want the talisman at all costs, it appears. It might prove dangerous in their hands. I know 'em to be tricky, threatening, cruel and——"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Much worse than that," she declared dryly. "But do you realize that, by chance, you came into something very valuable to others—that all this is really *none of your affair?*"

"Is it yours?"

"Not——"

"Not after you finished as courier for the fish? And now?"

"I am partly to blame."

"Because you didn't wait until you saw Towers before letting the ornament fall into the basket?"

"You think that?" Her tone was bitter.

"I don't know what to think. But this provided a test for me, Virginia. I've been wondering since I crashed—have I lost my nerve? Well——"

"You will find you have lost your sanity, Captain," she said huskily. "Why do you have to be a busybody? This meddling in other people's affairs seems to be an American mania."

"That's the French half of you talking, Virginia. Where's the American half—on a vacation?"

She didn't smile. "Oh, you'll be involved—and who could you go to with the story? It sounds like moonshine."

"Perhaps, if I saw more of you, my dear, I might in time give up the talisman."

Her blue eyes considered him with calculation.

"I wish I thought so. But I believe you have been hurt. You wouldn't trust me, or any woman——"

"Once bit, twice shy."

"As if all women were alike! No, you are bitter, disillusioned. Wouldn't it be better to live, as did the Romans, on a purely physical plane of pleasure, with no thought of the morrow? You have youth, private means, and you are rather attractive—or would be if you relaxed and forgot yourself for two minutes."

"What do you suggest?" asked Doren ironically.

She turned her head toward him and smiled, and the blue eyes invited, the lips seemed waiting.

"Let us get married—and go to the Coast on a long honeymoon. Men have found me attractive. Perhaps I am the type that could arouse your feelings so that you would get pleasure, if not content and happiness."

DOREN found his cheeks flushing. Her left hand rested on his knee. She looked bewitching. After all, what did he want? He had idolized Katherine—and she had become as ashes in his mouth. Here was palpitating beauty.

Suddenly his mind was wrenched back to cold reality.

"It would be like a dream if this were all on the level, darling. But there's a catch in it, I'm afraid. In this, my first proposal from a goddess. *The talisman would first have to be returned, wouldn't it?*"

She nodded slowly.

"Then I'd be buying you at a price. That would spoil everything."

"You will never know," she replied, almost under her breath, "but don't talk about the why of it, or of my sacrifice. My conscience is clean, Captain. I tried to save you—and you'll never know the fun we might have had together."

Doren looked straight ahead, wondering from whence came that stubborn and obstinate streak in him. Neither spoke again until he had pulled into the station. Virginia went to the ticket booth, alone; the next train in was the south-bound express for New York. Doren helped her with her luggage until a porter hopped down from a pullman parlor car.

Then his arms went around her, and the two must have appeared an officer

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and his sweetheart saying goodbye. Her lips were soft and warm and he felt himself melting.

"We could be married in New York," she whispered.

Song of the siren, hard to resist of old, was nothing on the task of shaking his head sadly and taking a last sniff of the maddening perfume and bidding farewell to those lips that seemed made just for his own.

"I'm sorry—maybe we can do it in the future, in a different way. I'll be seeing you, Virginia."

Tears were in her eyes, whether of sorrow or vexation and injured pride, he did not know. She mounted the steps and then he could see her only dimly inside, passing along. Her profile was turned to him. She made no attempt to look out through the window.

Doren felt a slight dampness on his forehead. It wasn't every day you turned down a proposal of marriage from a beauty like Virginia.

He wasn't conceited. Nor did he have the slightest notion she was in love with him. Even so, the offer had been appealing. What had persuaded her to offer herself, even with legal ties, as a price for the talisman?

DOREN had too many cocktails before dinner, and Scotch highballs with it, which made his Aunt Carrie shudder, educated as she was to certain wines for certain courses. Fortunately there were no guests. As her nephew poured brandy into his after dinner coffee, the butler announced that someone wished to speak to him on long distance.

"Hello, this is Masters, your uncle's chief clerk. He asked me to phone you. Two of our men were unexpectedly inducted yesterday. With Mr. Grahame at his apartment, sick with the grippe, we are short-handed. Could you——"

"Yes, I shall be in tomorrow morning. My new civies will be ready, I'm glad to say. I feel as if I were impersonating an officer. So long, Masters."

He retired early, to the master bedroom he always occupied. Tompkins had a smaller adjoining room. The house had been built in the whirlwind spending period of the twenties when many guests came with a "man", the word valet having become a Victorian cliche.

There was a reading light over the bed at its head. Beside it stood a tray with Scotch and soda, a little bucket of ice, cigarettes in a silver case, initialed W. G., and several recent detective books. Doren tried to read one. He couldn't get interested in who killed Cock Robin. The characters annoyed him, brittle and so clever he'd like to have all of them murdered. Several were killed up to page fifty, but not fast enough. He turned out the light and lay in the darkness hearing nothing but the outside rustle of leaves.

He fell off to sleep quickly. Came the familiar nightmare, trying to land, with dead and wounded in the fortress, only now he saw a lighted landing field and recognized Virginia waiting there, mockery on her face, and through a megaphone she was saying: "Too late. Too late. You had your chance for what would be: all the flowers and delight of pagan enjoyment in my arms. Now you will crash into the pit of darkness. . . ."

Struggling to get out of the dream he awoke before the landing (he always did) and his body was bathed in a cold sweat and he was shivering. That was the way he had lost his weight in the hospital.

Quickly he snapped on the light, reached for the bottle of Scotch and took a big swig from it, as lucky lads had done on Guada, where a fifth was worth a hundred bucks of anyone's pay.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A second snort went through him with an artificial warmth that was better than none. He lighted a cigarette with unsteady fingers. They'd given him a straight medical discharge. But, if not for his fine record in action, they might have added the dreaded P. N. too, meaning psycho-neurotic, which had been a curse to so many men returned to civilian life for nervous or mental reasons. He had read that the label, so unfair to those who had suffered shock or excessive battle fatigue, had been done away with.* Good enough. Why discharge a man and give him a lasting sense of shame as unfit, or the service fighting-word: yellow?

He turned out the light again, tried to relax. The drinks and the cigarette, following the nightmare, had left him all too wide awake. Why not drive back to New York alone in the night, and then get a few hours sleep?

Light on, Doren dressed. He must awaken Tompkins, but the later slept like a cat. He must tell him his intention and also leave a message for Aunt Carrie.

THE inner bedroom was at the right. He turned toward it. At that instant he saw a thin thread of smoke coiling from under the door. It wasn't locked. Pulling it open he dashed in, seeking fire. There was no fire. Instead an acrid, heavy fog of smoke. Doren tried to hold his breath, groped for the window, threw it open. Then he reached the couch, felt for Tompkins' body. Using only his right arm he managed to grasp the man around the waist, half lift and half drag him into his own room. After tossing him upon the bed Doren threw up all windows.

Running to the bathroom he returned with cold water in a glass, which he dashed in Tompkins' face. He groaned. Then Doren lifted his head, grasped the bottle of Scotch by the neck. More of it was spilled than the amount that made him cough and gasp. But his eyes opened. He took deep breaths, then became violently sick. After that he was able to take a drink unaided.

"Thanks, my lad. You must have noticed that smoke under the door just as that timed smoke bomb went off. I must have had enough to make me unconscious. In another five minutes I should have been dead."

Tompkins shook his head, coughed, and his voice grew stronger. "They could have planted one in your room, too, but they wanted to eliminate only me. *I think they want you alive.*"

Doren whistled. What of Virginia? Was she in contact with the conspirators and so reported his turn-down of her amazing proposal?

True, he had mistrusted her, very naturally. You always mistrust a liar, even a beautiful feminine liar. But unconsciously he had tried to make excuses for her. She acted under some mysterious duress, a compulsion like blackmail; he had more hoped than believed. But did those *others* know he had met her as she was leaving for New York? That hadn't been arranged. Yet someone right here had planted that smoke bomb.

He shuddered and his hand went toward the bottle. When you didn't know what to do, but had to stand and take it, that was what got you.

*The American Psychiatric Association announced the label was dropped for men discharged from the services because of the great misunderstanding it had caused. Dr. Arthur H. Huggies, chairman of the association, was quoted by the Associated Press as saying: "Many P.N. discharges are superior persons in civilian life, brilliant, skilled, with fine personalities, more sensitive than the run of men. From now on they will be spared the P.N. mark on their records, since it has proved a social and job barrier, as well as a personal handicap for the future."—Ed.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was an hour before Tompkins was himself. Then he insisted upon accompanying Doren back to New York, but did agree that Captain Grahame would drive. The latter left a short note for his aunt with the garage head, whom they aroused to open up and allow the car to be run out; also a warning about the servant's room from which smoke was now pouring and mixing with the wan yellow moonlight. Along with the master bedroom, the room Tompkins had occupied should be aired for several days.

CHAPTER VII

The Frame-up

"SHALL you be home for dinner, sir? I get frightfully lazy, just keeping the place in shape and feeding your oriental collection of fish."

"I'll try to be, Tompkins. Glad you have no bad after-effects from the smoke bomb."

"You rescued me in good time, Captain," said Tompkins.

"No more of that, fellow. I'm stopping by to get one of my new suits of civies. I'll be just a blasted old soldier, all that behind me."

Doren spoke grimly. In the Fifth Avenue tailor's dressing room, an hour later, he had, indeed, a peculiar sensation as he took off his uniform, tried on a blue suit. He walked in front of the big, three-sided mirrors. Yes, this man was thinner than the one he remembered. There were lines in his forehead and down from nostrils to mouth, and that last had a droop to it.

He told the tailor to send the uniform home with the other two new suits. Then he strolled out to Fifth Avenue and started to walk toward the nearest subway. Civilians and soldiers and sailors passed him. Did the men in service glance oddly at him — were the smiles he saw those of contempt reserved for a civilian under thirty? Hell, he couldn't wear his service ribbons and decorations could he? What do you do in a case like this, particularly with a bum left wing?

Doren stopped in front of a sporting goods store. It had a fine display of fishing equipment. A man who had been walking behind him also looked in at the lay-out. Nothing in that, the city was filled with window wishers. But while he was getting change in the subway, the same mousey chap passed him, to go through the turnstile. When Doren got off at Wall Street he glanced about, and now he was certain he was being followed, for the nondescript individual, eyes apparently watching the ground, was loitering ten paces behind.

Turning quickly, Doren went up to the fellow.

"Say, what is the big idea? I see you in front of a store on Fifth Avenue, on the subway, and now you are still along with me."

The other took out a card.

"Do you think I should be interested in you, sir?"

Doren read the card:

BENSON WRIGHT, M.D.
HAMPTON HOTEL
Specialist in Pathology
Behavioristics
Phychiatry

"What the devil has this to do with me?"

"Nothing, I trust. Unless you are suffering from a conspiracy complex, which would cause a man to think he was important enough to be shadowed. I'm minding my own business. People, many of them, are down in this district for other reasons than your affairs."

Doren apologized lamely. He went

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on. The doctor still tagged behind, even into the same building where his uncle had a floor of offices. The other man went into a different elevator. Just coincidence, that's all he assured himself. Yet he wasn't convinced.

Masters greeted him with reserved pleasure—so reserved one couldn't notice it. Tom Burrows, the customer's man, had been drafted. Would he stay around the board, answer questions in such a way that a yes balanced a no on rise or fall of the market?

"I'll take Burrows' spot, Masters, and I'll tell 'em what I think. We get an eighth of one point, on a buy or a sell, so what do we care."

The chief clerk smirked and went back to his books. There were no ticker readers at Wharton Grahame, Stocks & Bonds; only conservative investors. The market was quiet, with only fractional changes. Customers came in and several asked for Burrows. When told by Doren that he had been drafted, they sat down in the big comfortable chairs, took out copies of the WALL STREET JOURNAL. Whatever the new man knew, it appeared, he'd be forced to keep to himself.

AT NOON Masters came out from a back office, carrying a leather case. He drew Doren to one side. Several very large sales had been made to Horton & Horton, a house on the Stock Exchange. It wanted deliveries of securities. The firm's messenger was home, sick. Would Mr. Grahame lengthen his luncheon hour by taking the case over to the offices at 12 William Street?

"We have covering lists of the stocks," he explained, "I hope——"

"No, I'm not afraid," replied Doren tightly. He took the handle of the case, strolled right on out of the office. That was really about his speed, he figured—a reliable messenger boy.

He walked along, thinking he really should telephone his uncle and ask about his health? He felt some worry about his own. In his present jittery mood he was looking around for the little man who'd given him the card.

At Williams Street he began studying the numbered buildings. Ah, number 60. Horton & Horton couldn't be far away. Someone jostled him, hurrying along. He was turned half around.

At that instant Doren received a heavy blow at the base of the skull.

As he fell forward, only dimly conscious, hands were holding him on both sides.

He heard a voice that was, somehow, familiar, murmuring:

"I am Dr. Benson Wright . . . Yes, here is my card . . . . This is my patient. He is having one of his attacks. Recent medical discharge . . . He gets these mental fits . . . Thinks he is being shot again by a Jap marksman . . ."

Into the car he was carried, and then there was a sharp pain in his right arm and he went into the darkness of total unconsciousness.

In the last instant of ebbing thought he was deciding: yes, I was followed. Whatever that fraud says, I'm not off my bean at all.

WHEN Doren came to himself he found that he was seated upon the brownstone front of his own home. The leather case was gone. He glanced quickly at his wrist watch. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. His right hand went to the back of his head. There was soreness there, but no swelling.

Unless someone had seen him being black-jacked on Williams Street, just who, aside from Tompkins, could he expect to believe his story?

Slowly he got to his feet. He let himself in and walked upstairs, calling:

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Tompkins, are you in?"

"Yes, Captain, I've been waiting for you."

There were two men in the big room besides Tompkins. They had a hard, capable appearance. One of them, seated in Doren's favorite chair, had a leather case on his knees.

Doren started to tell his adventure. The other man picked up the telephone book.

"There is no Dr. Benson Wright listed. All mental specialists have phones. No need to go on with your story, mister. Your servant was out between noon and one thirty. When you didn't return to the office Mr. Masters telephoned your uncle. He got in touch with the Brewster Private Detective Service. Downtown they thought you were acting queer. We came here, waited for Tompkins, went in with him. We found this case, with the securities, hidden under the mattress of your bed."

"Now," said the fellow with the case, soothingly, "no harm has been done, and your uncle will not press a complaint against a sick nephew."

Doren was aghast. "Why, this is some kind of a plot against me!"

"The specialist he spoke to over the wire advised him that you might say that, as an obvious symptom of the malady from which you are suffering, and need treatment."

Doren took a deep breath and strove to hold in his temper. The sweat was pouring from his forehead and the palms of his hands were wet. He ignored the two private detectives, told exactly what had happened, to Tompkins, who nodded; he was alert, but silent—as if to indicate that this was not the time for the servant to talk.

"What are you two dicks sticking around for?" Doren finally asked.

"We wish to take you to your uncle's city residence, in the Burton apartments. He didn't think——"

"That it was safe for me to be wandering around alone, I suppose. Well, my word is as good as the next man's. Tompkins, I'll be home for dinner."

Tompkins nodded absently. One detective went out ahead of Doren, the other followed, saying they'd all get a taxi over at Central Park West.

Just before the trio reached the corner a long white ambulance pulled up at the curb. Two men in white uniforms jumped out. They looked more like husky orderlies than doctors.

"Is this the patient?" asked one of them briskly.

One of the detetctives nodded. "Yep. You got the commitment paper?"

"Don't worry about that. Now come'n, Mister Grahame, and don't make no disturbance, because we don't want to be rough."

Doren looked about for help. People were passing. Several men and women stopped to watch. Just at the point of calling for help, he saw the look of horror on one woman's face, though several men half laughed.

An orderly was making a spinning motion at his own forehead—then pointing to it, then at Grahame. It was the pantomime for the malady of madness.

The four men were about him. The back door to the ambulance was opened. He didn't try to struggle as he was gently pushed in, but sat down on a bench running along one side, and lighted a cigarette. One of the orderlies lounged at the front of the ambulance; the other near the door. They sat on camp stools fastened to the floor.

He offered his pack of cigarettes. Two were taken.

"Say, fellows," he drawled, "do you know what I'm supposed to have done?"

"We are not supposed to talk," said

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one of the men cautiously, "but you left your aunt's last night, but not before two rooms were filled with smoke and your own bed in fire. Oh, nothing serious; they put out the fire quickly. Odd antics, mate. Now, as I hear it, you took two hundred grand in stocks you were supposed to deliver, came home and hid 'em under the mattress. You need a rest and treatment."

"Thanks," said Doren. His mouth was dry. So, a fire had been started after he and Tompkins had left, to make him appear eccentric to the borderland where one goes over the cliffs of sanity.

Then this messenger-steal gag. And yet if he were on a jury would he believe the true story?

By jumping Jupiter, no! From the start, one development sounded just a bit more crazy that the next. Why, it was just what the conspirators were counting on!

CHAPTER VIII

The Works

THE TWO orderlies, Doren decided, were merely run-of-the-mill employees of a private sanitorium. He was being kidnaped, to be sure, unquestionably across the state line to where a man's liberty could be signed away by a doctor and a near relation.

"Where are we headed?" he asked idly.

"Dr. Leonard's san, on Long Island Sound. Don't worry, buddie, if you do what you're told you'll be okay. If you don't get tough you'll never be given the works."

"Aw, pipe down," put in the other man in white. "You'll scare the guy. The doc has a real mental rest home. Some of the patients never want to leave."

Doren tried to imagine such patients, but found the picture improbable, like that of prisoners crying when their terms were up in jail. He wondered if Tompkins had been given any hint of where he was being taken? Most certainly not. These birds were talking because he would be a type of inmate who would never be visited, save by his uncle who would have been taken in by the fire and the supposed theft, both doubtless attributed to war shock and nerve fatigue.

It was all too pat. He only had the word of others. Perhaps his uncle knew nothing of the snatching at all.

He sat silent while the ambulance sped on. There was only one explanation: the motivating brain behind all this wanted the talisman. In the sanitorium pressure would be brought upon him. The more he resisted, the crazier he would appear. Touching his brow he felt it chilly and damp. What they did to him might go beyond the limits of endurance. He wouldn't be believed when he said, truly, that he didn't know the hiding place of the green-and-gold fish.

In a kind of indecision, fearful of thin nerve walls of resistance, he had thought it better *not* to know. And yet —why had he been stubborn? His imagination, heightened by the importance that Virginia and the others gave to the fish, showed it must be a passport to events of great moment and consequence; but unless the talisman meant danger to his country all this was none of his business. In the last case it were better if he had gone directly to the F.B.I.

Yet, with nothing to tell save Virginia's fanciful tale of a magic charm, what credence would be given his story?

It had led to this. He might have married Virginia, given back the talisman, and in time she might have learned to love him. Now he had nothing to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

look forward to except terror—terror with helplessness, since there could be nothing weaker than a man branded a neurotic misfit.

Doren did not know the length of time of the ride. Over two hours, surely, before the ambulance came to a halt. He heard gates creak open. The motor started again for a short period, then stopped.

"We get out here," said one of the orderlies. "Now, remember, just do what you are told. This san can be nice, or a kinda jump into hell. It all depends on you."

The three men blinked in the golden sunlight. Doren saw a circular wall behind a long lawn and a few trees. He could smell the Sound at low tide. Facing it stood two white buildings. A guard on either side of him, he was marched toward the smaller structure, only two stories high.

The odd part of the layout was that there were many barred iron doors, as jail cells, and these were on the level with a wide cement walk. Briefly he saw patients inside, in one piece suits that appeared to come down and cover their feet.

He was led to a door at the end. An orderly unlocked it. The room inside was larger than the others, furnished like a second-class hotel, save that the toilet was right alongside a bureau.

"In with you, mister. One of the docs will be along. Do what you are told. You and the others, getting sunlight and air, are quiet cases. Upstairs there are padded cells."

The orderly grinned. "A strait-jacket ain't fun if you can't do Houdini's tricks. Be wise and don't try doing it the hard way."

DOREN walked in. The door was locked behind him. He was a prisoner. Where could he look for mercy—a fool who had blundered into something too big for him?

He lighted a cigarette. It was dreadful to have all initiative taken away from you, to be entirely upon the receiving end.

A man in black linen suit came into his scope of vision, put on a smile, then turned it off. The man unlocked the door and came inside. From his side pocket he brought out a half pint of whiskey, a smaller bottle and a small glass.

"I am Dr. Newton, one of Dr. Leonard's associates. We want your stay here to be a pleasant one. The first thing you need is rest. I'm going to pour a little paraldehyde in with a drink of whiskey."

He suited action to his words; the result seemed half and half.

"This tastes like rotten fish, but it will make you sleep. I'll place the bottles here on the bureau. If you need more mix a second dose. Dr. Leonard will see you when you awake. There is a push button over your cot. You will be served meals here, and you can have cigarettes and liquor, in reason. Before regular treatment, the nerves need relaxing."

Dr. Newton spoke pleasantly. What would happen, Doren wondered, if he resisted? A strait-jacket, and drugs either forced down his throat or plunged into him with a syringe?

Doren took the glass, drank the contents shudderingly. The doctor nodded approval and told him to sit down upon the bed; he would find himself slowly becoming sleepy. Then the door clicked, and was locked. The prisoner took a drink of whiskey, straight, to get the taste of the drug out of his mouth.

Strange, he reflected, our bodies are at the command of tiny secretions from flowers and plants. Man, so great and lofty in his ambitions and even realiza-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions, can be put to sleep with one drug, be made crazy with another, like *Cannibis Indica,* smoked in cigarettes . . . He felt his muscles slowly go limp, his eyelids close, and a slow overwhelming drowsiness taking possession of him.

In ten minutes he was asleep on the cot, victim of a rotten-smelling white liquid science had at its disposal . . . where, he wondered with a last flash of consciousness, was all this leading?

WHERE the treatment was pointing Doren didn't at first realize. Every time he awoke, it seemed, an orderly was standing by the cot, ready with another drink of whiskey and the sleeping drug. Did this go on two days—or three? He didn't know, but he awoke increasingly more jitterish and unsteady, his brain blurred and his eyes bleary, so nervous that he reached with unsteady hand for the little glass.

He remembered the last time this happened. For he finally opened his eyes to an awakening, without an orderly by the cot and no bottles upon the bureau. He managed to stumble toward a wash stand, stooped and put his mouth under the faucet. No water came. His tongue was dry and parched. Though not hungry he knew he was weak from lack of food. Rest, he had been given, of a sort, but his nerves were in worse condition than ever.

Just then the door swung open. An orderly grinned at him.

"Come with me. Dr. Leonard wants to see you now."

"In as bad a condition as possible," said Doren, in a voice that trembled.

He put on his tie and his coat, followed the other toward the main building, then down hallways and turns, until a door was thrown open and he entered a room that appeared to be a private study. The way to it had been through a private entrance, thus avoiding the administrative office. Now a man in a blue dressing gown arose from a big easy chair and smiled, and a tapering white hand ordered him to take another leather chair facing the first.

The orderly, as if following prior orders, brought a tray and placed it on a low table by Doren's chair. On the tray was a pitcher containing water and ice, and a bottle of rye. Doren drank from the pitcher, then took a long drink from the bottle.

"No apologies, Dr. Leonard—I imagine you are the head of this sanitorium—but the treatment has made a wreck of me."

"We build on that lowered resistance. All your troubles will be taken over by me, as if I were an elder brother. This is my treatment of psycho-neurotic patients."

Doren took a desperate resolve. Either Dr. Leonard was in with the conspirators or he was not. He would learn the truth by telling all but the essential truth.

"Doctor, either you have been deceived or I am in a dreadful fix indeed. Will you listen to my story?"

"That was what I brought you here for—so that I might listen."

Doren told him, in detail, just what had happened since the talisman had come into his possession, inserting only one lie: he insisted that a friend of his had been given the fish and asked to hide it, but not to tell him where it was hidden. Because of the nervous effects of long hospitalization, followed by the sinking news that he would not go back to fly in the army arm of the air service, he wanted to solve the mystery of the talisman, yet he feared the possession of what the other side wanted—the secret of where it could be secured.

Dr. Leonard nodded from time to time. When Doren was finished the tips of his listener's fingers made an

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

arch and his lips pursed into a sullen line. He stared at the ex-pilot for a long time.

"In my experience," he said slowly, "I hear some truth—many lies. I am sifting what you say now. How much of it is sheer delusion, how much founded on fact, I must afterward decide. But one angle you have avoided mentioning—if this mysterious fish you speak about doesn't really belong to you, except by mistake, why have you been so stubborn? Why didn't you give it up at a really wonderful profit?"

DOREN hesitated. "There was something important in a sinister and unhealthy way about the means taken to obtain it. I felt, somehow, a great danger could be averted if the secret of the talisman could be solved."

"Yet you claim you do not know where you could lay hands upon it?"

"That is true. All nervousness, I know, has a basis in *fear*—which can take a thousand troubling forms. I didn't forsee I'd be in a jam exactly, but if I were I knew that I couldn't take it. Not unless I knew what I might be fighting for."

"Then, if you knew, you would tell me?"

"Yes, in exchange for safeguards of liberty. But one thing is clear to me, Doctor: If you are so interested in the talisman, I'm not here under any misunderstanding. You are in cahoots with those others, you want the fish just as much as they want it. Well, I have only one weapon to use, Dr. Leonard—money. I will give you ten thousand dollars for my freedom."

The sanitorium head smirked. "You think ten thousand is of any importance? Bah, that is chicken feed. Now look me straight in the eyes."

As Doren, in his weakened condition, obeyed the eyes gazing into his own appeared to grow larger and larger. Then he heard a voice say soothingly: "Go to sleep, go to sleep," and his eyelids began to droop veery slowly, and he drifted off into a hypnotic state in which he knew only an entrance into darkness.

Then the doctor was shaking his good right hand, slapping him upon the back.

"Take another drink, Grahame. You are an odd hypnotic subject, one with fixed ideas, for you were just as deceptive in the trance as when conscious—*unless you are telling the truth.* In such a case we may be forced to try *the great experiment,* since any painful means of persuasion would be of no avail."

Doren took two drinks in succession. Any experiment was better than a course of torture.

"What we shall insist upon your doing, Grahame, is a matter for consultation. However, think it over; for if you will not—or cannot—tell where the talisman is, the experiment will either kill you or, very likely, you will heartily wish that you had never been born."

Dr. Leonard pushed a button. The orderly came to take Doren back to his room. Before he left he looked longingly at the bottle. The physician told the guard to take it along as the patient had been under considerable strain and might undergo more very shortly. Doren was relieved, but he wondered . . . wasn't it the custom to coddle a condemned man on the last day, give him what he wanted as to food and drink?

Back in his cell, a meal was brought to him, also cigarettes he needed, and a pot of black coffee. Doren splashed Scotch into the coffee. Afterward he felt much better, physically, and smoked with only a slightly shaking hand.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What the experiment that sounded so dangerous might be he couldn't imagine but it was something that left out painful means of persuasion. That hypnotic state would have revealed the hiding place if he had known it. It would be wonderful if Dr. Leonard—and the others — believed he told the truth. Why, they might even let him out of here!

Doren took a deep breath. That was too easy. That was the drinks of Scotch talking. He remembered what Dr. Leonard had said, in the cold, impassive voice that might belong to a scientific fiend:

"The experiment will either kill you . . . or you will wish heartily that you had never been born."

CHAPTER IX

Exchange of Souls

A THREAT to a free man, concluded Doren, means only just so much, for he can think of ways to defend himself; better still, strike back. The entire policed community stands behind a citizen. But when you are the inmate of a sanitorium, with the dreadful stigma marking you with an unbalanced mind, you are as cut off from effective protest as if struck dumb.

Was he still on a sane track? The continued drinks and the medicine taken for drugged sleep, the lack of food, had pulled his nerves apart—so that he became an easy subject to hypnotic control, his will power weakened.

Doren pulled a chair toward the cage-like door. He could hear heavy breathing from one side, little quivering moans from the other. Yet these weren't the entirely violent and insane. He thought of the padded cells, the strait-jackets, and he shuddered; his chest felt as if compressed and he opened his mouth to take in great gusts of air.

The only person he had to count upon was Tompkins. His uncle, if indeed he had signed commitment papers, deceived by a supposed act of arson and robbery, would think he was being given helpful treatment.

Oh, Virginia had warned him, if vaguely, and he hadn't listened. It could be she had offered herself, *not as a bribe but to save him from a possible fate she knew was impending.*

What if he were given another chance to accept her proposal? Doren groaned. He realized that giving in that way would be a surrender of manhood. You couldn't cling to a woman's hand to be led to safety.

Yet all that had stopped him from telling where the talisman was hidden had been that he did not know.

The consultation Dr. Leonard had spoken of was, no doubt, now being held. When he was sent for, what would be the ordeal?

He jumped from the chair, went to the bottle of Scotch, tilted it to his mouth. Yes, even the artificial warmth and courage of alcohol might be better than the lack of either. For he had a present fear—a stabbing fear—looming like a picture in his mind: it was that of a shaking, slobbering wretch, broken in hysteria. Better death than that.

Slyly, Doren wrapped a water glass in a towel, smashed it upon the floor. He found a sharp piece, over five inches long, put it in his pocket. If nothing else, he could slash arteries in his wrists before they could stop him.

Oddly, so strange may be the twisted turns of the mind, Doren thought of the old Romans. They held, when disaster was impossible to avoid, suicide was acceptible if not noble. With that last act to fall back upon, as a last resource, they could view life calmly if cynically.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anything rather than utter slavery and debasement. Well, it made you feel better when you knew you could do something yourself. Left a measure of time and circumstance during which you could get another chance.

No, that the men out on the Pacific he had known as comrades—the fellows he had known at college, and played football against—that they should read such news about Captain Grahame! He swore savagely, took that sharp piece of glass from his pocket, kicked it under the cot. Damn it, he wouldn't go like a coward.

Doren felt that his cheeks were hot. It wasn't others that were draining away his courage; he had been doing that himself with little doubts of himself by his imagination.

He had welcomed the talisman that must be of paramount importance, somehow, as a little private war in civilian life—and then been afraid of responsibility, turned that over to Tompkins.

Yes, and that little terrier of a man had never complained, kept silent under torture. The surprising healing of the fish—how explain that? Well, if there were magic in the fish maybe Tompkins would wish to know where he was imprisoned—and also wish, holding the talisman, to rescue him. . . . Ah, again, let someone else do it . . . better try reaching into that bottomless well of the human spirit reinforced by something greater by far than itself.

JUST then Doren heard the crunch of gravel. He wondered if Dr. Leonard might now be sending for him, and he braced himself to meet the unknown like a man.

The orderly was grumpy as he unlocked the door, called to the patient, asked him to come along.

"Hanged lot of funny business around this place," he growled.

"Isn't there always?" asked Doren.

"Oh, I'm used to nuts who insist they're in their right minds. But I'm not paid to talk. Dr. Leonard wants to see you."

Doren went along with him. The two entered by a side entrance again. As they approached a half open door voices could be heard from within.

"The possibilities are tremendous. *If the great experiment succeeds there are so-called war criminals who would give millions for this means of escape.*"

The orderly coughed, warningly. Entering, Doren saw Dr. Leonard at his desk. Two men, wearing white masks concealing the upper part of their features, sat stiffly on the edge of chairs.

Manson Towers smirked at him from where he stood by an artificial fire place.

"Captain Grahame, we meet again," he said, with relish.

"Let us proceed," said Dr. Leonard, "for the professor is waiting impatiently."

A masked man followed Doren, another was behind Manson. The group went up a stairway into what looked like an empty room, what could be seen of it; the right side of it was curtained.

Only one man was there: a tall, hunch-backed figure, with a heavy black beard covering most of his face; the hair looked as if dyed. He had brown eyes set in deep sockets, and his red lips protruded. Wrists and huge hands were prominent because of a tan shirt too tight for him, the cloth of which extended only half way down his hairy arms.

The only furnishings to be seen were two large wooden chairs. Doren was motioned to one of them. As he sat down he saw Towers being shoved into the other.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The masked men pulled straps from side pockets and quickly and efficiently strapped Towers' wrists to the flat arms of the chair.

Then the two started toward Doren. He half arose, then subsided. What could he do with only one good fist? They strapped his wrists down, too, and the man with the beard nodded. He pulled aside the curtain, running upon a wire, and the two chairs, that had little rollers, were pushed over on either side of a maze of shining wires and metal tubes overhead, and strange, dangling contrivances.

"Dr. Leonard, you have had a report of my experiment with two dogs. Whether an animal has both soul and being—such as science claims for a human—I know not; but one dog was timid and shy, a cowardly creature, the other a fighter. I put them under my electrical transformer. Now the timid dog has become fierce, and the fierce dog a coward. Whatever was in their brains made *a perfect exchange*. After several weeks I exchanged them back again, and now the animals are as they were.

"If this can be done with animals why not with human beings? Through my control of a flow of electrons, used as a magnetic force, an electric fluid, I shall confound the field of the physicists. The brain has already been treated with electric shock for certain nervous disorders, and electric fever for various maladies. I have gone further. I connect two brains with my electric control, start my motor, and through my kenetrons and an unheard of speed up of negatives and positive attraction, I exchange the two brains, or souls, or personality—and memory—call it what you will. All I do is pull my switch for three minutes."

Manson Towers screamed: "Dr. Leonard, am I to be killed by one of your mad patients?"

The doctor smiled. "Two men were needed for the experiment. I heard you say: *'I wish I were Captain Grahame for just an hour. I could regain what we lost.'* That was what gave me the idea —if the professor succeeds *you will be Captain Grahame.* And the possibilities, even beyond, the custody of what we have lost, are limitless. He will then occupy the shell of your body. You can be sure we will keep that safely guarded —until it is time for you to return to yourself again."

MAD! thought Doren. At last I have either lost my mind, or this is a wild hallucination concocted to scare me out of my wits, so that I'll confess what I do not know. . . .

But no one gave him the slightest attention. Dr. Leonard was trying to soothe Towers, who began blubbering that he was loyal and shouldn't die the death of a traitor.

"This is some sort of electric chair," he cried.

Just then an electric motor started up. A shining circular metal cup swung out over Doren's head, settled upon it. The professor pushed it down tight over his brow, declared it was an excellent fit.

Towers had fainted in the chair. His head was pushed back, the other metal crown slowly sank upon it and was set into place.

Doren felt no sensation except a peculiar buzzing in his forehead.

He could not seriously accept what he had heard. Dr. Leonard was white and tense. Doren thought, why this is what he meant about war criminals: *if this invention proved successful the great war criminals, like Hitler, could make escapes into the bodies of obscure citizens — and the obscure citizens would take all the punishment!*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This scientist was one of those researchers who appeared sane to get two human guinea pigs to experiment upon. When he pulled the main switch it would prove, as Towers feared: just another version of the electic chair. Two charred bodies would remain, after the three minutes, or if not charred bodies, brains burnt to ashes.

The professor was still talking: "They laughed at me in Paris. I shall show them unheard of flow and magnetic control of electronic power . . . Now, Doctor, hold your watch for three minutes. I figure that will prove long enough."

Doren felt trapped. An iron band was pressing about his head. He knew that golden pin-points of light were piercing his brain. Then came an explosion and all he knew was a great golden globe in which he seemed to be traveling at the speed of a comet. . . . Afterward, darkness and a calm sleep. . . .

Then came a weird fear as he trembled upon the brink of consciousness, a fear that had never troubled mortal man since the beginning of Time. He was not dead, he must be alive, for he could feel tightly pressed eyelids, and the tips of his fingers were against the chair. In his right temple a pulse beat like a little hammer and his tongue touched lips that seemed thick and unfamiliar.

He was afraid, afraid as no one had ever been before, afraid to open his eyes.

Courage, thought Doren; this may all be a mad dream from which you will awake in your old cell; a nightmare is nothing to bother you after the night is gone. Open your eyes.

He did so slowly. No, it was not a dream, but stark, awful, mind numbing reality.

Doren saw himself seated in the other chair. *That* was Captain Grahame, not yet conscious. And he—his consciousness of being, his memory, must have been exchanged, through the monstrous invention, into the body of Manson Towers.

He looked down. There were the other's hands, under his control; and up alongside his ears must be the sideburns that Doren hated. He was inside Towers' detestable body!

There was a nightmare element in it all. He was the first man ever to occupy another man's body . . . unless he might be insane, under the sway of a fantastic mental obsession or hallucination.

He heard a voice strange to him issue from his throat:

"Beyond belief!" The words came hoarsely. "Beyond belief."

The two masked men were removing the straps from his wrists. The inventor had stopped the motor and the crown of wire and tubes swung from his head. As this was done for the body he had occupied all his life, seated opposite to him, the eyes fluttered open, widened a bit.

"I—I was sure we were to be murdered," said the voice of Doren Grahame.

He lifted a left arm awkwardly.

"Be careful of that arm," said Doren quickly. "There is a silver plate in it, and most of the strength it once had is now gone."

He thought, and his heart—Tower's heart—beat madly: *I have lost myself in this exchange but if I tried to explain that to the world I would label myself hopelessly insane!*

At that instant the possibilities of the future in a new body struck him. Manson Towers' sweat glands were as good as his own. A chill dew sprang out on the forehead and a drop trinkled down the long nose.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAPTER X

The Aftermath

DR. LEONARD was patting the inventor upon the back.

"You have succeeded, Professor Diettrum. It is wonderful. I can see——"

"Do not see, Doctor, into any theft of my invention," growled the other. "I live within easy reach of it, and I possess enough nitro to blow it and the sanitorium sky high. I want the world to know, when the right time comes. Medical science will be revolutionized. No scientist has even dreamed of my work. Science will not believe until, in a public test, I exchange the minds and memories of two eminent scientists. Then it will be admitted that I have accomplished what has been deemed impossible."

Doren was thinking: Now, in my body, I wonder how Towers will go about an attempt to recover the talisman? Ah, he would have clear sailing. . . . But Dr. Leonard was speaking:

"Mr. Grahame—I'm going to call you that, Towers, from now on—in taking over the body of the ex-pilot you have only the body and not his mind. But it is my belief that certain *habits* cling to the body. For example, smoking and drinking, jingling keys in the pocket, whistling aimlessly—and so on. *Might not habit make him go to see if a treasure he values is still safely where he hid it?*

"In any case, Grahame's man servant will be your accomplice, and I believe he is in the confidence of his master. He will tell you everything you wish to know. Meantime, I shall keep your body safely here until it is time for you to return for it."

Doren trembled. He had forgotten he was still to be a prisoner.

"Professor Diettrum, is there anything you might suggest?" asked Dr. Leonard.

"No, though I would like to have these men photographed now and again after several months. It is my belief that just as a man and a woman who are married for many decades somehow get to look alike, that personality changes expression, just so, each man will get something of the smile, the set of the jaw, of his former self."

"Perhaps, in years, but this first experiment will not leave both of these men alive for very long," returned Dr. Leonard idly.

Thus Doren knew that he had not very long to live.

"Now, Towers" (and Doren realized he was being addressed), "we have some rather private matters to discuss. Your orderly is waiting outside; you will be returned to the same room in the other building."

Doren was quietly conducted to the door by a masked man. His stride seemed odd, for Towers possessed shorter legs than the ones to which he was accustomed. The orderly needed no further instructions.

"Come along, Mr. Towers," he said, in a soothing voice. "I assure you, now that Dr. Leonard has you in hand, your progress will be astonishing."

It sounded like a set piece, memorized, though it was new to Doren. He went along, and as the two left the main building he looked upon the world and the sky with new eyes—eyes that didn't see quite so well as his own.

THE first thing Doren did when the orderly had locked the door and left, was to reach for the bottle and take a swig of whiskey. Then he coughed and spluttered. Apparently his new body wasn't accustomed to such fiery liquid.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thrusting his hands into the trouser pockets Doren felt coins and a few loose bills. No one had thought to remove Towers' things from his pockets before the exchange of souls—if that was what one would call it.

Doren searched quickly. He found a dozen cards:

MR. MANSON TOWERS
444 PARK AVENUE
Special Employment Services

One wouldn't be missed, but he could remember the address anyway.

In an inside pocket he found a check book on the Countchase Bank and an unmailed letter to a tailoring firm, with Towers' name and home address in the upper right hand corner of the envelope. He memorized the last and thought he could duplicate that peculiar French script. In returning the cards, he noticed a scribbled notation on the back of one of them: V. B. 9 West 90th St.

V. B. Could that be Virginia Boriza?

Finding a stub of a pencil in the coat, he scribbled the three items on the woodwork of an empty drawer of the bureau. Also copies of Towers' handwriting. Then he pulled a chair to the door. He heard someone panting. It was the orderly, on the run. Just as he expected, the man stripped the trousers, coat and vest of everything they contained.

"Might bring me the cigarettes in Mr. Grahame's suit," Doren drawled. "Tell Dr. Leonard; he will understand."

The man stared at him and left without saying a word.

Well, the slip-up on the doctor's part was understandable. The possibility of success for the experiment may have seemed improbable to him—indeed, to anyone except the inventor.

One thing was sure: Manson Towers hadn't been too important to be risked. His mission—in the body of Grahame—successful and the talisman back in safe hands, there would be a second switch—and then Doren Grahame, as himself, would die mysteriously.

Doren could see why he was better out of the way. He knew only that the fish was of great importance—but even that was too much. Now he knew the existence of an invention worth millions—if Hitler and the other principle war criminals could be persuaded to use this method of changing into others to escape punishment. Also, he was aware that Dr. Leonard ran a corrupt private sanitorium where no doubt many other sane men had been unjustly imprisoned.

The sum of what he knew, or suspected, added up too high. Ever Doren clung to the slightest of hopes—that Tompkins might discover where he had been taken and do something about releasing him.

Now Dr. Leonard would release his body with Towers' brain behind the forehead, and Tompkins would naturally believe, on the return of the master, that he had recovered from a nervous breakdown and was himself once more. With such an advantage, Towers couldn't go wrong.

Or would he make a slip that would cause Tompkins to become suspicious? It was a slender reed to lean upon. But it was the only one he could think of, for even if he got out of the building he couldn't scale the wall. The gate was guarded. On the Sound side he was certain all small boats were chained and locked.

What if Tompkins found a way to rescue Doren Grahame? *His master wasn't here!* The depth of the impossible situation was maddening. Yet to writhe impotently until the hour came to put him out of the way permanently,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would prove a form of long-drawn-out torture he shuddered to contemplate.

HE STRETCHED and flexed his muscles . . . *Towers'* muscles. One improvement only: now he possessed two good fists and arms—and he remembered how to make use of them. Carrying around that weak left, with the silver plate in it, was ever a discouragement when a man-to-man fight was in prospect.

The time dragged. The orderly finally brought supper on a tray, cigarettes and another bottle of Scotch. Dr. Leonard didn't stint on his liquor supplies. He had slipped up, forgetting that Towers' stomach wasn't as strong for fire water as that of the ex-pilot. Well, this change wasn't a thing you'd be expected to get accustomed to in short order.

The meal over, Doren smoked a cigarette, finding his throat quite used to inhaling.

He tried taxing his memory to find if he had ever read of anything in theory or history that made the switch of souls probable. Only this: in reincarnation, or transmigration, he remembered that the soul of a separate individual being with what is called memory, had been compared to a flame that was carried, upon death, from one body to that of a new born infant. But only in the case of adepts did the memory persist, but these savants could remember back to one life after another.

If the soul was a flame, as this cult taught, Professor Diettrum had used electrons in a strange magnetic way in exchanging souls from one body to another. It proved the truth of one religious and metaphysical claim: that the personality, the mind and memory, made use of the matter inside the skull, but could continue after that physical matter was dead. The brain in the skull contained only tools for the soul. Doren was aware that his thoughts were dizzy and whirling. He was reaching beyond logic, into the mystical, with speculations beyond his reach.

CHAPTER XI

In the Night

DOREN figured he wouldn't be searched twice. He tore several margin strips from an old magazine and copied down the information he had scrawled inside the bureau drawer; then he rubbed out what was on the woodwork.

"You'd think I was going away from here," he said aloud, and the strange voice made him jump.

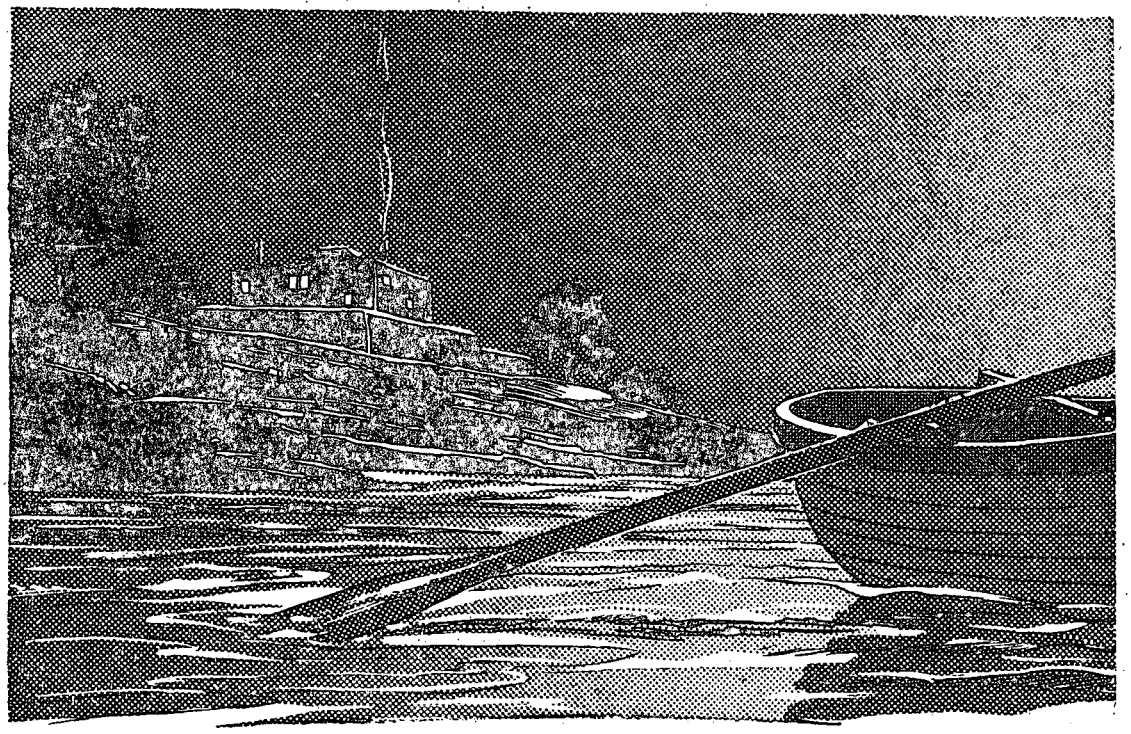
This getting used to being imprisoned in another man's body wasn't an easy matter. You couldn't compare it to a disguise—a masquerade make-up, for that could be taken off and the original shown underneath.

Now someone else, an enemy, was free, not only resembling Doren Grahame but, physically, the person himself.

Whatever that impostor did, Doren Grahame would be responsible. That hurt. Because Doren longed to be at liberty as Manson Towers and see what he could accomplish to gum up the works.

To free himself appeared impossible. There were double doors to the room, letting out onto the yard. One, now open, was a regulation house door; the other resembled a prison cell door. With two good arms he might overcome an orderly, which would have been impossible with his own body, but the walls baffled him. He didn't know whether, as Manson Towers, he could swim even a stroke, granting that he managed to reach the Sound.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Once the other gained possession of the green-and-gold fish talisman, Doren could almost see the brief newspaper account of his army record and suicide.

The moon was obscured by heavy clouds that night. Doren had no thought of sleep. He sat by the cell door, smoking, feeling that sense of unreality found in a terrible dream. The orderly had taken Towers' watch, so he had no idea of the time. Now and again he heard the muttering and moans of sleeping and drugged patients.

Suddenly the space before the cell door was blocked by forms heavier than darkness.

"You have been off duty all day, eh? But this is the cell occupied by Doren Grahame?"

The words came in a low whisper. Then: "Keep it low, young man. If there is an alarm I'll shoot you quick as a cockney's wink. Now open that cell door and go in first, on tip-toe. . . . Doren, are you there?"

"Yes, I'm here," said the prisoner in a husky voice.

He saw it all, clear as a flash upon a screen. Tompkins was out there with a gun, and he had captured an orderly.

Only in darkness was there a chance for escape. He needed too long for any explanation to be believed right now. If Tompkins saw Manson Towers everything would be off.

The steel door opened softly.

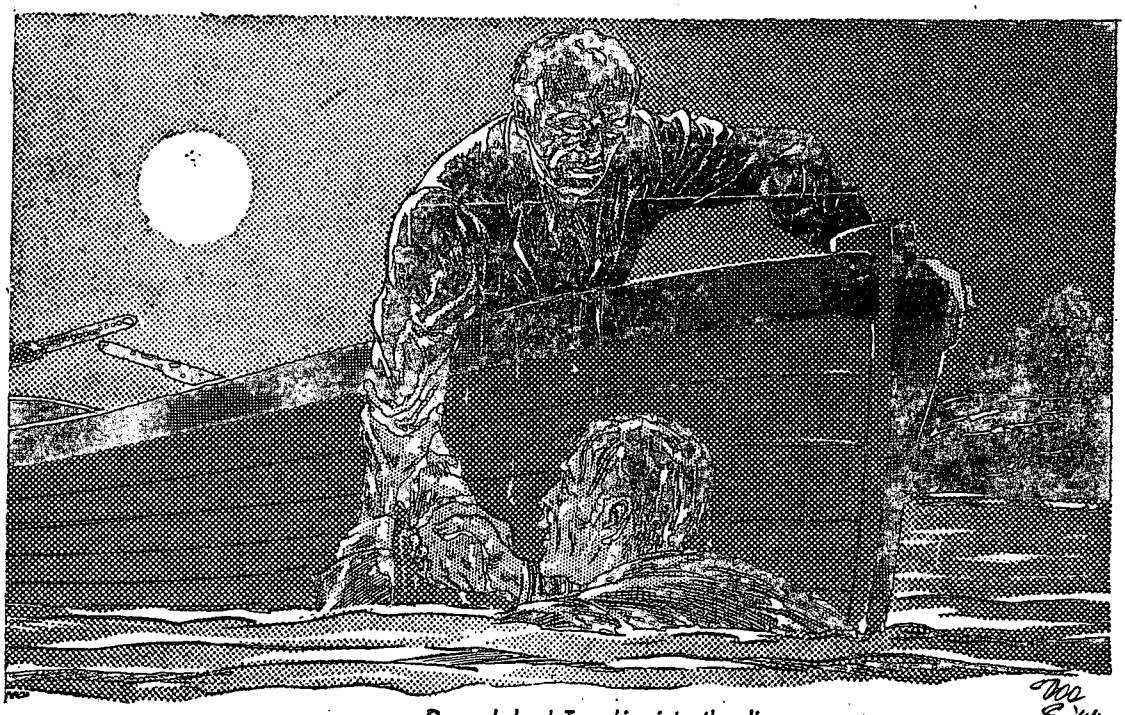
"Don't risk a flash-light," Doren cautioned. "We will throw this bird upon the bed, gag and bind him."

"Tear strips from a pillow case for a gag. I've some rope here with me. But how strange your voice sounds, sir."

"Not a cold. I'll explain later."

"Very well," whispered Tompkins. The two men gagged and bound the orderly. "I have a launch anchored out in the little cove. A dingy is on the other side of the wall. We will swim around. I waited outside for this person to return from his day off. I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Doren helped Tompkins into the dingy

slugged the guard at the gate. Anything here you want to take along?"

"Not even the air that is breathed here. Yours is rather a one-man commando raid."

"Folks have forgotten. We were tough and we had raids too, in the first World War. Come along, sir."

DOREN crept out after his rescuer, praying that the clouds would continue to shut out the moon's rays.

The two men kept close to the building, hugged it at the further end, crouched over as, under cover of the wall, they slowly went toward the waters of the Sound.

"The wall extends about fifteen feet out into the Sound," said Tompkins, "I wonder if you can swim out and around it with that game left arm?"

In answer Doren plunged into the water. He had to take a chance. Maybe Manson Towers had never learned to swim. But Doren Grahame, in his body, at least remembered. The beach shelved quickly into a depth over his head. Quickly he let his feet go and found himself swimming strongly. He need not have worried. He swam out farther than necessary, then turned toward a rocky shore. A dingy had been pulled up. Tompkins, breathing naturally, was right on top of him. Together they got the little craft into the water.

Out in the cove was the launch, without lights, and Tompkins rowed around in circles for some time, finding it. Finally it was located and Doren tumbled in, over the side. Tompkins tied the dingy at the stern, then climbed aboard and pulled up the anchor. Doren made no attempt to help him —the silver plate supposedly in his weak left arm would explain that—for he was afraid Tompkins would light a cigarette; and one lighted match (before he had a chance to explain the in-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

credible story) would not only spoil his chance of rescue but might be dangerous. The quiet little guy was hell on wheels when he let himself go.

Fortunately Tompkins went at once to the engine, spun the wheel. There was a chug-chug-chug-chug and the launch turned.

"Tompkins, where are we?" Doren asked in a muffled voice.

"About five miles from the Soundgate Yacht Club. You still are a member, sir. I thought we might borrow some dry clothes there."

"My friend," said Doren, and there was desperation in him, "if this voice of mine sounds odd to you, I want, first, to recall a few things only you and I remember—a list of toys you gave me when I was a boy; the kind of bait you made for me for bass fishing, with cloth and chicken feathers and part of an old spoon; how my dad and you had a secret together about your past life; and how you always overdid the role of servant when my mother was present. No one knows these things except you and I, Tompkins, isn't that so?"

"That is so, sir. You don't think that *double* of yours who came to your home late this afternoon fooled me, do you, though I allowed him to think so? He believes my name is Thompson; and do you know the question he asked, after not more than ten minutes in the house: 'My man, I've had an upset time of it since I've been gone. Maybe my brain has been a bit off. Tell me, where did *we* hide the green-and-gold fish?' Of course *we* didn't hide it. I hid it. You never knew where it was located. So I knew he was an imposter—even though I could swear it was your face . . . ."

It was my face, Doren almost blurted out, but all this had to be taken step by step.

"Give me your undivided attention, Tompkins, for ten minutes—and don't head toward the Soundgate Yacht Club, that wouldn't do at all."

"Proceed, sir; but pardon me for saying—your voice—but I held the talisman tightly and made my wish—that I be able to rescue you. So I know it *is* you, sir."

"Do you really believe in the magic power of the talisman?"

"It worked with my torture burns and I got you out of that nursing home safely."

"Well, old man, that magic from the buried centuries of ancient days isn't as hard to take as my story."

Very carefully Doren told exactly what had happened, omitting nothing.

WHEN he had finished Tompkins whistled softly. Then he began a line of cross-examination, going back to Doren's boyhood and early manhood, asking about teachers and classmates, certain football games and the scores—details that were not of importance in themselves but that only Doren Grahame could have remembered correctly.

Then he groaned.

"Doren, I've heard of fixes, but this fix you're in is the worst I ever heard about."

"You're telling me," said the other grimly, "and we must work this out ourselves. Even if we get evidence of a sinister plot I couldn't go to the F.B.I. with this yarn. The department heads would think I was batty, for sure."

"No doubt . . . I'm going to hug the shore until we get to the long strip of land leading out from Greenwich. An old friend of yours, Ben Taylor, lives in one of the bungalows behind the Indian Harbor Yacht Club. I'll go ashore alone, borrow some clothes. We can walk to the station."

"And the launch?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It will be found and returned. I stole it from the Soundgate Yacht Club."

"You were taking chances."

"You must do that in war, my lad; and this is the wildest kind of a private war."

Doren shivered as spray broke over his already soaked body.

"In this private war, old fellow, you have done everything effective. You stood up in the auto wreck, you endured the torture, kept the secret; now you have released me. Fine kind of hero I turned out to be. I've been on the taking end but I haven't struck back yet."

With the voice still strange to him, Doren went on: "I can explain one point: Manson Towers might have acted a bit dumb. He had an excuse he doesn't know about. I had whiskey pressed upon me. Whiskey and paraldehyde, and these wore down my nerves so I was an easy subject for hypnotic control. Towers isn't a drinking man. I tried a hooker and found that out. He has been suffering from the nerves he took over—and the nerves influence the mind."

"Don't be too hard on yourself, sir. You'd had a tough time of it," replied Tompkins.

He seemed able to steer through the tossing waves, in semi-darkness without hesitation.

"Tell me, how did you find me?" Doren asked, after a pause.

"I ran to the front of the house and, with opera glasses I picked up, I was able to catch the state and license number on the ambulance. Checked it up by a long distance call to the proper department. After the ambulance pulled away I went immediately to see your uncle. He said that all the facts had been laid before him. It seems someone impersonating an U. S. Army medical doctor came to him. Since you were discharged you were out of service jurisdiction; but this doc said he knew you and wanted you put in a private sanatorium for your own good. He suggested Dr. Leonard's, out of New York state, to cut out red tape—and, as wasn't explained, an investigation by proper authorities that would have stopped you from being railroaded.

"I hired a reliable private detective to get me all the data on the sanatorium. Tonight I acted—after being convinced the man who came to your home and claimed to be Doren Grahame was a double chosen to deceive me. Why, after that ignorant query—where did *we* hide the green-and-gold fish?—he insisted upon changing back into the army uniform you felt was no longer proper for you to wear! It had been returned from your tailor when he sent on the other civilian clothes you'd ordered.

"He seemed confused, asked for his check book. I said there wasn't a check book on the premises. I guess he figured it too rash to ask where he banked his money. When he finds out, he can ask for your cancelled checks and study copying your signature."

Doren said, "You must get to the bank and draw out my funds, then deposit them in another bank in an account either of us can draw checks upon. It looks as if Manson Towers hasn't much money in the Towers' account or he wouldn't be so interested."

Doren shuddered, and it wasn't from the chill water.

"Now he is sleeping in my bed, in my home, with a right to disgrace my uniform, since no one can dispute his right to be in my body."

"It doesn't seem to have occurred to you, sir," suggested Tompkins, "that the same goes for the man he was—Manson Towers—and that turn about is fair play."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAPTER XII

In Another's Skin

THE launch was guided to Tweed's Island. Tompkins made it secure to a floating buoy. With Doren rowing, the dingy slipped past the Indian Harbor Yacht Club and up one of the channels on either side of the long strip of land pushed out into the Sound from the village of Greenwich.

A false gray dawn was now breaking. Tompkins went ashore at a miniature dock. Doren didn't ask him what yarn he would tell Ben Taylor. He knew that the little Englishman was quite capable of taking care of his own lies.

In not longer than twenty minutes Tompkins returned to the dock with a suitcase. In it was two complete changes of clothing. One suit was too big for Tompkins, a bit too small for Doren; but it was a relief to wring out their wet things and place them in the suitcase.

They went up a little path that led to the main highway.

"What yarn did you cook up for Taylor," Doren asked.

"I whispered low about high-hush stuff of Military Intelligence—and that there were reasons he could not see and talk with you."

"Darn good reasons. Ben was always a good skate."

"And I also explained about the launch, belonging to the Soundgate Yacht Club, that can be picked up and returned. He was aching to ask questions. Poor fellow, a bad heart keeps him out of things."

"Anything else?"

"Yes," murmured Tompkins, "I borrowed fifty dollars. After paying the detective agency I was out of cash."

"Well, you won't be out from now on. We're going to be partners and the next time you say 'sir' to me I'll give you one of my old left hooks. I always was sure a British gentleman was hidden under that subservient slub-dub."

IF TOMPKINS winced as the two walked toward Greenwich, in the silver dawn slowly spreading, Doren did not notice it. He was taking stock of the situation.

"I don't know whether I told you that I overheard what wasn't intended for my ears, about the great experiment. If it succeeds, *there are so-called war criminals who would give millions for this means of escape.* Study those words, I've remembered them verbatim, and what stands out?"

"So-called," replied Tompkins. "Meaning either Dr. Leonard or his associate whose words came to you, didn't think of Hitler and his chief gangsters as war criminals, but was refining the generally used term."

"Right. If the secret of the invention could be sent to Germany it could be used, at the last ditch, for the chief criminals to escape into the bodies of innocent civilians. No one would believe the new souls occupying the bodies of Hitler and his henchman. Nor would the F.B.I. believe me if I went to them with my story. You've heard of schizophrenia, or split personality? * My yarn would sound so fantastic, coupled with an admission I broke out of a mental institution, that I wager I'd be taken into custody and sent right back."

"I agree with you, Doren.".

*Schizophrenia sounds German but it is from the Greek roots, "schizein" to split, and "phrenos," the mind. Sometimes the mentally affected person has two separate selves. Or he may suffer from a disintegration of the personality, and a type of psychosis characterized by loss of contact with his actual surroundings and varied hallucinations may delude him.—Ed.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Good—and from now on I'll call you Tom. Do you realize that a medical man who would sell German leaders a chance to escape just punishment must be sympathetic with their cause—and that is my first link to the people who will go to any limit to get the talisman back in their possession. Further, we are not dealing with only one or two individuals; aside from Towers, Dr. Leonard, and his two masked aids, there were the men who tried to wreck your car. And you spoke of a fake Army physician who visited my uncle. There we have seven men. There may be more."

"And women too," said Tompkins dryly.

"Yes," Doren admitted slowly, "but from what I've seen I consider Virginia Boriza at the most a dupe."

"You don't consider the talisman's magic has anything to do with its importance?" Tompkins asked, after a moment.

Doren shook his head. "No, your burns healed quickly because they were not as bad as they appeared. You found me by using your wits, and we were blessed with good luck. I feel now that men as ruthless as these are not common criminals. These men are joined for a purpose that must be greater than one we can now imagine. The talisman is a stumbling block at present—urgent need for it is an understatement.

"Now we'll consider my escape as Manson Towers. Just how many will Dr. Leonard allow in on the success of the experiment of exchange of souls? The fewer, the less division of loot, once Professor Diettrum's secret use of electrons has been stolen from him. Aside from war criminals, wouldn't a millionaire, near death, in payment for an illegal operation that would change him into a healthy body, pay greatly from a store of wealth he could have secreted in a safe place? The other soul, in a failing body, would die shortly. Those two masked men are in with Dr. Leonard. The man masquerading as myself knows; and I know. That may be all. So perhaps I can venture, in the most perfect disguise ever imagined, into the life of Manson Towers and discover what is behind that need for the talisman."

"Until one of those masked men gets to you."

"After what I've gone through, ordinary risks seem paltry," replied Doren grimly. "I have a start—a suspicion of the enemy within our borders; if I can only gain evidence that appears sane and plausible, then I can go to the Federal Bureau of Investigation or G 2 of the Army, and not be taken for a crank."

Tompkins sniffed. "You have cut out a big task for yourself. You may laugh all you want at the magic powers of the talisman. When I get home, I'm going to grab that ancient ornament and start doing steady wishing in your favor."

Doren laughed. "I wonder if we can find an all night lunch wagon. This new stomach of mine is mighty hungry. And you've had a long go without food and drink."

The village was in sight, now, and Tompkins was first to notice a lunchroom, light shining through the windows. They made for it. The fellow behind the counter said they had three-quarters of an hour before the next train came through for New York. They seated themselves on stools. At the back, facing them, was a stand with cakes and pies below a large mirror stretching the entire length of the wagon.

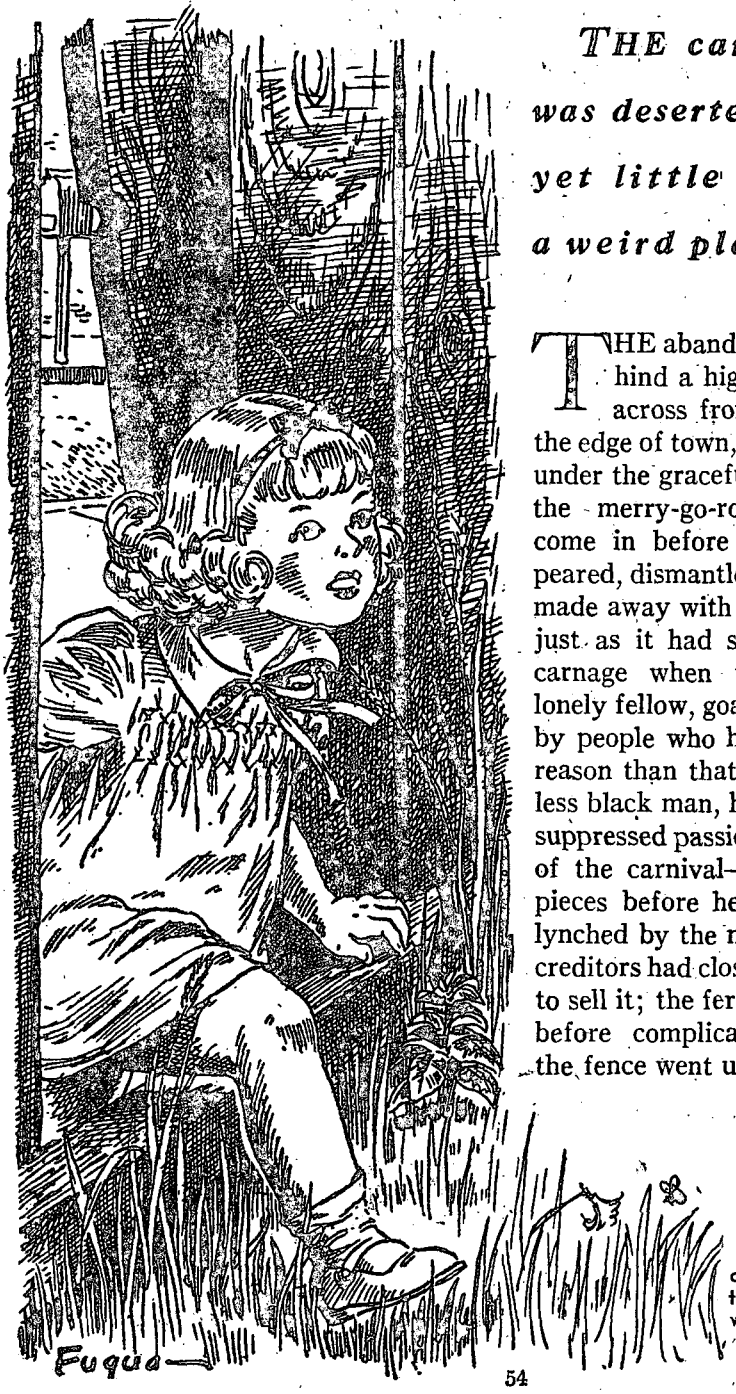
Doren gazed at his new self, tried not to flinch. Studying that thin face,

(Continued on page 132)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CAROUSEL

BY AUGUST DERLETH



THE carnival ground was deserted, boarded up, yet little Marcia found a weird playmate there!

THE abandoned carnival stood behind a high board fence directly across from the Benjin house at the edge of town, and in one corner of it, under the graceful mulberry tree, stood the merry-go-round. Someone had come in before the legal notices appeared, dismantled the ferris wheel, and made away with it. Otherwise it stood just as it had stood on that night of carnage when that poor bewildered lonely fellow, goaded beyond endurance by people who hated him for no other reason than that he was a poor, harmless black man, had exploded into long-suppressed passion and killed the owner of the carnival—torn him literally to pieces before he was fallen upon and lynched by the maddened crowd. The creditors had closed the carnival, hoping to sell it; the ferris wheel had been sold before complications appeared; then the fence went up. For a little while it

There it was, the creaky old carousel! And she knew that "he" would come and play with her as he always did!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a sort of never-never land for the village boys and girls; but even they forgot about it at last, and now it was the sole and exclusive domain of Marcia Benjin.

She spent a large part of each day in the carnival grounds, and haunted the merry-go-round. It was not without reason that she went through the opening the children had made in the fence; she needed this security and escape from her stepmother, for when Marcia's father was away at his work, his second wife made no secret of her resentment for the only child of his first.

The child was five, and much alone. Because of her stepmother's malicious hatred, she was far lonelier than she should ever have been. In another year, she would be old enough to go to school, but in that time, too, she would escape her stepmother, and Mrs. Benjin did not know whether she wished that end.

Mrs. Benjin was dark, with a thin mouth and snapping brown eyes. She was jealous of her stepdaughter, whom she looked upon as the symbol of John Benjin's first wife. She was jealous of her with a dark, sultry passion, and yet she resented with ill-suppressed fury the little girl's escape into the carnival grounds.

Unfortunately for the child, she did not always notice the passage of time, and so from time to time came home late to her meals. This only increased her stepmother's rage, but Mrs. Benjin saw in Marcia's laxity a possible way in which the girl could be brought wholly into her power.

"I don't want to speak to Marcia about her habits, John," she said sulkily, "you know I hesitate. After all, she is *your* daughter, and I don't want to intrude between you, but I think she ought to learn to come home on time."

"Of course, she should," agreed John Benjin, good-naturedly. He was a large, broad-shouldered man, easy-going and completely unaware of anything in his wife but the aspect she chose for him to see. "I'll talk to her."

MARCIA came into the house and brought the evening sunlight with her. She kissed her father, smiled gravely at her stepmother, and sat down.

"I'm sorry I'm late," she said.

"You ought not to be late," said Benjin gently. "It's hard enough to keep supper warm till I get home, and it's twice as hard to keep after that. Your mother works hard all day and she's always glad to get the dishes off the table."

"I just didn't notice," said Marcia.

"Oh, it doesn't really matter about me, I suppose," Mrs. Benjin interjected with a helpless air.

"I didn't notice, really," persisted Marcia earnestly. "We were playing, and before I knew it I heard the six o'clock bell."

"With whom were you playing?" asked John Benjin casually, feeling that now he had done his duty.

"With the black man," said Marcia ingenuously.

Benjin went on buttering his bread unconcernedly, but Mrs. Benjin pricked up her ears. "With whom?" she asked, unable to keep a little sharp excitement out of her voice.

Suddenly there was an unaccountable tension around the table. A baffling obstinancy came into Marcia's eyes; Benjin looked up, puzzled; across from him his wife held herself in and repeated her question.

"Answer your mother, Marcia."

"I said it."

"Then say it again."

"No." Her answer was barely whispered.

"Of course, perhaps she cannot be

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expected to trust me," said Mrs. Benjin, looking distressed, clasping her hands at her breast, turning her wedding ring nervously.

"Answer your mother, Marcia," said Benjin in a sharp voice. "With whom were you playing?"

"With the black man."

"But there is no black man in town, surely," said Mrs. Benjin. "Not since—well since long ago, when you were a little baby."

"When Mum was still here."

"Yes, dear."

THEY waited for Marcia to say more, but she did not. After she had been put to bed, Mrs. Benjin expressed some concern for her. But not so he; by that time he had more or less figured it out. It was perfectly natural that children should imagine playmates; he had done it himself as a boy. It was especially true of lonely children, and it could not be denied that all the other children of the neighborhood were either in school or were too much under five to serve as adequate companions for Marcia.

"Still a *black man*!" said Mrs. Benjin with an alarm which she pretended very hard to feel.

"Yes, I admit that *is* a strange coincidence, isn't it?"

"It certainly is."

"It's three years now," she said musingly. She remembered it very well because it was at the carnival that she had first caught a good look at John Benjin and determined to have him for her own, if something could be made to come between his wife and him. Something had come between them, but it was none of her doing; Mrs. Benjin's death had taken place only a little over a year afterward, and she had had her way with John a year later.

She thought about what Marcia had said and saw in this too something she could utilize to widen a rift between the child and her father, and, once she could turn Marcia toward her, she could mold her as she wished. She did not know quite what she wanted to do with the girl, but in her heart she wished devoutly the girl were not here so that she could be free of that feeling of being watched as if—as if from beyond; yes, that was it; it was as if the eyes of John Benjin's first wife looked at her out of the dark eyes of her daughter.

Two days later Marcia was late again.

"If this doesn't stop," said Benjin in his placid way, though there was no mistaking his determination, "you'll not be permitted to go over to that merry-go-round any more, Marcia."

Of this, plainly, Marcia was afraid. "Oh, no, please!" she cried.

"You *must* learn to come home on time. Anyway, I don't think it's good for you to be over there alone all the time. That machinery is getting old, and may be falling to pieces. You may get hurt."

"But I'm not . . ." She sealed her lips and shot a quick, contemplative glance at her stepmother.

"What, dear?" asked Mrs. Benjin, leaning toward her with synthetic sweetness on her hard features.

"Nothing."

"Marcia!" said her father.

"Nothing, Mother," she said.

It enraged Mrs. Benjin that the child hesitated to call her "Mother." It had been so from the first, and every attempt to force her to obey her father's wishes in this only made it more obvious.

"I wish she would trust me," she said, biting her lip with such force as to bring tears to her eyes.

"Now, now, Nell—take it easy," he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said, putting one hand on her arm, and looking at Marcia with tired indignation.

ONCE again there was that tension around the table. What stirred and further angered Mrs. Benjin was this: she was convinced with the deepest conviction that somehow the child knew what her stepmother was about; Marcia could not tell her father, she could not put her feeling into words, but somehow she *knew*; and it was a sources of rage and humiliation that this five-year-old girl should so easily see through what was a mystery to Benjin. Perhaps Marcia had even guessed that her stepmother's quick hope had sprung up when Benjin had spoken of physical danger for her if the machinery fell apart.

"Now then," said Benjin, turning to his daughter, "whatever it was you were going to say, say it now; we've got to show your new mother that we trust her, don't we?"

"Yes." She said this reluctantly.

"Well, then."

No answer.

"Come, Marcia—please. Just pretend you're playing a game with us—with me, then."

She shook her head.

"It was the black man again, wasn't it?" Mrs. Benjin could not keep herself from making the guess.

Marcia looked at her blandly, saying nothing.

Overflowing with irritation, Benjin said urgently, "Answer your mother at once, Marcia, or take the consequences."

"Yes," said Marcia in a low voice.

"There, I knew it!" said Mrs. Benjin triumphantly. "And now I wonder, John—is it imagination, or is it just plain lying?"

"I don't tell lies," said Marcia scornfully. She was hurt.

"No, dear—I didn't mean that you *meant* to tell lies, but that perhaps you just couldn't help it."

The girl gazed at her without expression; what she thought and felt lay hidden behind her eyes, and this wall against her curiosity baffled and further infuriated Mrs. Benjin. It was inevitable, the woman knew, that soon now the child must be broken, and she must be broken to the woman's taste.

AFTER that, Marcia was gone from the house more and more often. Perhaps she sensed the woman's waiting cruelty; perhaps the house in which once her own mother had created her world was too dark with this other woman's hatred and jealousy and angry suspicions; she sought her haven from dawn to sunset, and would have gone back of evenings if she had not been prevented from doing so. Seeing this, Mrs. Benjin set about to circumvent the girl as much as possible.

But Marcia quickly learned to develop a remarkable deviousness; she escaped her stepmother repeatedly; she began to assume a wiliness and shrewdness to match the woman's, and always managed, at times of crisis, to keep her father between them in such a way that there were times when it became impossible for the woman to conceal her exasperation, and Benjin had to remind her to be patient and understanding—"Let Marcia come to you, my dear; don't force yourself upon her."

"Ah, I tried so hard!" Mrs. Benjin cried out, making her habitual gesture of twisting her wedding ring in agitation.

It was a touching scene, in which Marcia did not come off at all well. She was ultimately forbidden to go to the carnival grounds.

She disobeyed, and went anyway.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That was the result Mrs. Benjin desired.

She was curiously unable to face her husband that night at the supper table, to which for once, knowing she had done wrong, Marcia preceded her father. Mrs. Benjin avoided his eyes in so telling a manner that he could not help noticing that something was wrong. Finally, he asked. She shook her head. He divined that it concerned Marcia, and finally sent the girl to her room.

"Oh, I don't want to say it," she said, distressed. "But Marcia ran away and spent the whole day over there."

"Then I will have to punish her," he said.

Punishment did not prevent her from running away.

"It's humiliating," said Mrs. Benjin on the second occasion. "I mean, it hurts me to know that she must dislike me so much that she wants to risk being punished by you—and she loves you; I can see that—by going over there. To that black man or whoever it is she imagines plays with her there."

"Is she still talking about that?"

"Yes."

He shook his head. "She must learn to obey you, Nell. We can't go on like this. It will disrupt the household."

"I'm afraid it may."

"It can't be. You'll have to take her in hand."

"But I can't—I really can't." But inwardly she exulted; she had waited patiently for this. "How could I punish her?"

"I'm afraid you must; she must learn to respect you."

She played her part to perfection, so that in the end poor deluded John Benjin, who sincerely loved his daughter, actually felt sorrier for his wife than he did for Marcia at the thought of the girl's being punished. He was a stern man, but not an unkind one; he was simple, and had no knowledge of complexity; his first wife had been similar to him, unmotivated by complex passions and frustrations, and he would have been honestly horrified if he could have seen into his second wife's mind.

Mrs. Benjin bided her time.

AFTER Marcia had been lulled into a sense of false security, Mrs. Benjin asked about "the black man. Does he still play with you?"

Marcia admitted that he did. "He told me not to worry any more, he would watch over me. Over papa, too."

"Oh, he did, did he?" She could not keep the chillness from her voice. "Weren't you told not to tell lies, dear?"

She whipped her very thoroughly, and when he came home, Benjin found his wife in tears, which stood in her eyes in contrast to his daughter's white-lipped pain and indignation which could not hide a kind of sullen loathing for her stepmother. Thus victimized, Benjin was more than ordinarily sympathetic with his wife; he simply could not understand what had come over his daughter.

After Marcia had gone to bed, her father went to her room and sat beside her bed and talked to her. He was trying very hard to understand, and when he had softened his daughter sufficiently, she clung to him and sobbed. She was lonesome. Her stepmother hated her; why couldn't he understand? She was like the black man. He was lonesome, too. He had always been lonesome, all his life.

Benjin shook her. "Marcia! What are you talking about?"

She tried to explain, faltered before the look in his eyes, and was silent, retreating behind the wall of childhood into that world of her own, peopled with fantasies and strange beings sprung from her lonely imaginations.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He made another attempt, trying to be patient. "How big is he—this black man?" he asked.

"Real big—bigger than you, Daddy. And he's so strong. He makes the merry-go-round go for me. I get a ride every day."

"Is he nice?"

"He's glad to see me whenever I come. He just stays there all the time, by the merry-go-round waiting for me. He's the nicest man I ever knew, except you, Daddy. And he's going to watch over me and you, too."

"Like your guardian angel?"

"Yes, except he's black, and I guess my guardian angel's white."

It was not a very satisfying or illuminating conversation. He was very puzzled when he sought his own bed, fretting now lest his daughter's loneliness were affecting her mind.

HAVING made so auspicious a beginning, Mrs. Benjin could hardly contain herself until a second opportunity to punish Marcia was offered her. But that initial whipping had betrayed the violence of her hatred to the child, and Marcia walked with care. She came home to supper on time night after night, and the summer deepened toward autumn. As day followed day without overt disobedience upon which Mrs. Benjin could seize as a pretext to work her angry way with her stepdaughter, she grew irate and frustrated, and at last, one day, when she knew John Benjin would be remaining at his desk longer than usual, and so would not be home on time for supper, she took matters into her own hands to force the issue, and peremptorily forbade Marcia to go again to the carnival grounds.

Marcia ran away. Mrs. Benjin had known she would.

She waited with an almost unholy anticipation for the day to end.

Promptly at a quarter to six Marcia came tripping across the street and into the house, humming a little melody. She stopped short at sight of her stepmother waiting in sultry triumph.

"You disobeyed me," said Mrs. Benjin coldly.

"What are you going to do to me?"

"I'm going to punish you. Your father said I must."

"No, please."

"Please what?"

"Please, Mother, don't."

"Yes, it's for your own good."

Mrs. Benjin could not keep herself from prolonging the child's torture. She came slowly around the table, bringing the stout whip she had held behind her gradually into sight of the child's horrified eyes.

With a shrill cry of fear, Marcia turned and fled.

Across the street, through the hole in the fence, into the carnival grounds.

But Mrs. Benjin was not so easily thwarted. She went after her, crossing the road and working her way into the grounds through that small opening in the fence, being careful to bring the whip with her, and remembering how easily some of that machinery might collapse and fall or be brought to fall on someone, a child who would know no better. . . .

She saw the child readily enough, clinging to one of the weather-beaten horses of the carousel. But Marcia was no longer afraid; she sat there with a curiously dispassionate air, watching her come on with such a sense of security from her that for a moment Mrs. Benjin was nonplussed.

As she came up to the merry-go-round her stepdaughter's voice came out at her.

"Don't! Don't touch me! Mr. Black Man won't let you. Mr. Black Man is watching over me."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Slowly, slowly, almost imperceptibly, the carousel began to move.

Mrs. Benjin, seeing only that somehow the child seemed to be escaping her, leaped forward. At the same time Marcia slipped from the back of the wooden horse, darted quickly across, and dropped off the other side of the carousel.

As Mrs. Benjin stepped up into the merry-go-round, something took hold of her.

There was one horrible scream, and then a succession of terrible sounds that mounted together with the grinding of the carousel going faster and faster. Into the gathering dusk curious oddments spun and flew from the merry-go-round, most of them spattering red upon the carousel and the earth beyond.

Marcia watched with interest and satisfaction.

When the carousel was still again, she walked around it toward the hole in the fence. There was nothing to be seen of her stepmother same some dark masses here and there. One of them lay between Marcia and her way of egress. She walked around it with almost savage detachment.

It was Mrs. Benjin's left hand, with the wedding ring still on one finger.

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SCIENTIST

IT IS universally agreed that sagacious, astute, economizing Ben Franklin had one of the most perceiving minds of the eighteenth century. In that era of mental giants he was one of America's shining lights and his name and fame carried to two continents. Through the history books he is known and revered by every American school child.

Men of science still marvel at this wise man who in the 1700's was able to discern so acutely principles of science which our generation has only now fully accepted and utilized. His close, scrutinizing observation and his clear, detailed analysis can be used as a model for scientific investigation. His keen alertness is a marvel to behold.

There is a letter from Franklin to his friend, Alexander Small, written in 1760 which demonstrates this alertness perfectly. Franklin writes to his friend about what he calls the origin of the Northeast Storms. It appears that an eclipse of the moon was to have taken place at Philadelphia on a certain Friday night at about nine o'clock. Franklin had intended to observe it, but at seven a vicious Northeast storm had come up, and by nine o'clock the dark billowing clouds and rain so completely obscured the sky that observation of the eclipse was impossible.

Strangely enough, the next morning brought the paper from Boston in which there was a clear account of the beginning of the eclipse. This seemed unusual to Franklin since Boston lies northeast of Philadelphia and the storm should have logically occurred there first. Moreover, from the letters from his many friends throughout the colonies Franklin learned that the more Northeasterly their position, the *later* the storm began.

From these observations Franklin arrived at some apparently simple yet wonderfullly clear conclusions. He writes:

"Suppose a long canal of water stopped at the end by a gate. The water is quite at rest till the gate is open, then it begins to move out through the gate; the water next the gate is first in motion, and moves towards the gate; the water next to that first water moves next, and so on successively, till the water at the head of the canal is in motion, which is last of all. In this case all the water moves indeed towards the gate, but the successive times of beginning motion are the contrary way—from the gate backwards to the head of the canal. Again, suppose the air in a chamber at rest, no current through the room till you make a fire in the chimney. Immediately the air in the chimney, being rarefied by the fire, rises; the air next the chimney flows in to supply its place, moving towards the chimney; and in consequence, the rest of the air successively, quite back to the door. Thus to produce our northeast storms, I suppose some great heat and rarefaction of the air in or about the Gulph of Mexico; the air thence rising has its place supplied by the next more northern, cooler, and therefore denser and heavier, air; that, being in motion, is followed by the next more northern air, etc. etc., in a successive current, to which current our coast and inland ridge of mountains give the direction of northeast as they lie N.E. and S.W."

Franklin, you see, shrewdly pointed out what has come to be an important principle of meteorological forecasting. The warm air from the South given moisture over the Gulf and more heat over the southwestern deserts, does rise up and overrun the comparatively cooler, denser air from the north, which moves in beneath it. The rising of the warm air cools it and it finally condenses into clouds and rain. And there, as Franklin pointed out 150 years ago, is the origin of the northeastern storms.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IT SEEMED a swell joke to let this city slicker waste his time fishing where there were no fish—until he actually got a bite!

THE INCOMPLETE ANGLER

By RAYMOND CHAN

THE little group of loungers in the general store spotted Willard Thrumpman even before he entered, and there was no mistaking his identity.

"Jeepers, fellers," Glen Murdock shouted, peering out the window and almost dropping his pipe from his mouth, "Here comes a fisherman—an *amateur* fisherman!"

A loud guffaw burst out as ten necks craned in the direction of the window, and then they settled back expectantly as the doorbell jangled merrily and Willard Thrumpman entered the store.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen!" he declared pompously, and then suddenly winked mischievously at them. "How's the fishing today?"

"Fishin's good as it always is," Glen Murdock answered. "Looks like you're out for a big haul." He was thinking he had never seen such a ridiculous spectacle.

Thrumpman was short and roly poly. He wore a brand new shirt, and a brand new pair of knickers, and his feet were shod in a brand new pair of hip boots. About his person were hung at least fifteen different bits of fisherman's apparatus, from rod and reel to a gigantic wicker creel, all of them obviously brand new. On his chubby, round head was the only used article—an ancient, battered felt hat, studded with an as-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sortment of gaudy flys. All of them new, of course.

"First day of my vacation," Thrumpman was saying enthusiastically. "There won't be a day for two weeks that I won't be in that river, dragging fish out of it every minute."

"You done much fishin' before?" Lem Jenson asked solemnly.

"Only once before. Last summer—but I caught on to it awful fast. I guess the bug just bit me. . . . You boys like fishing?"

"Crazy about it," Lem averred. "All of us?"

They all nodded.

"How come you aren't out casting a line right now?"

"Rheumatism," Lem said.

"Got to mind the store," Glen explained.

"Well," Thrumpman beamed, "I'll be on my way. Just wanted to drop in and make your acquaintance, gents. Probably see you down at the river one of these days. Say—" he looked at them slyly. "You wouldn't happen to know of some special place in the river where they bite extra good, would you? A sand bar, or something?"

"Waal—" said Glen Murdock.

"Do you?"

"You might wade into the river about a hundred paces north of Cal Clemens' white fence. Look for a deep spot in the river bed—it 'pears dark on the surface. Try droppin' your line in there."

"You bet—thanks a lot!" Thrumpman rolled his eyes in ecstacy. "I can just taste those fish now! There's nothing I like better than to get up from a table leaving just the fish's head and tail, with nothing in between but the bones. . . . Well, so long, gents!"

The bell jangled again, and they could see him through the window, bouncing happily on his way.

Lem doubled up with laughter, and the others joined in. Glen Murdock was all smiles as he replaced his pipestem between his teeth.

"Pore fool," he said chuckling. "Don't know where he got the notion to come here with all them store bought gadgets. Ain't been a fish in that river for twenty-thirty years."

BUT Willard Thrumpman was blissfully unaware of the mockery he had left behind him. All he wanted to do was fish. He uttered a wild whoop as he came into view of the river, and ran threshing through the long grass and down the pebbly bank into the smooth flowing water.

"Come on, you fish!" he exhorted, and with the careless fervor of a convert, he made a hasty cast, and quickly reeled in his line.

It came back empty, but Willard was not daunted for a moment. He cast again and again, slowly wading upstream at the same time. The water sloshed comfortably around his feet; a warm breeze curled about his neck. He was blissfully happy.

"There's the fence!" he cried as he rounded a bend. Glen's tip suddenly came to mind again, and he hurried forward, kicking up a spray. His line snagged, and an expensive fly disappeared into the water, but he plunged ahead, too exhilarated to be annoyed.

". . . eighty two, eighty three, eighty four . . ." he was counting off the distance, when suddenly he saw it—an inky, threatening dark patch on the river's otherwise green surface. For a moment he stopped, a little awed by its ominous note of foreboding, then, "Fudge! If there's fish there, I'm interested," he chided himself, and drew closer.

He fixed his second best lure on the line, and, with an unusually accurate cast, dropped it squarely into the hole.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It sank quickly, and he gripped the rod with both hands, bracing himself against the current, and waited for results. They were not long in coming.

The line leaped into sudden life, and began spinning out of the reel incredibly fast. Fifty feet played out in a few brief seconds, and still the line continued to flash down into the hole.

Willard lost his head; he grabbed frantically at the reel and locked the line, and the next moment the whole rod went spinning out of his hand and disappeared into the hole.

He ran forward and stared after it; not a bubble remained. Only the gaping darkness stared back at him.

"What a fish!" he shouted aloud. "What a fish! Strong as an ox! I've *got* to bring that fish in!"

For the first time he realized he was weaponless; his rod was gone, and the fish stayed out of sight, mocking him.

"You wait!" he called, and splashed his way out of the water; he began running at top speed, through the grass, over the road back to the general store.

THE same ten were still sitting there, in their identical positions when he burst in on them amid an excited jangle of the doorbell.

"I want a rod!" he shouted incoherently. "Gimme a rod . . . a line too. . . . Got a fish . . . giant thing!"

Glen Murdock moved off his seat faster than he had moved in ten years. While his hands fumbled with an assortment of rods, he stared unbelieving at the little fat man.

"You caught a fish?" Lem Jenson demanded. "A fish in that river?"

"A big one—I didn't catch him. He pulled the rod out of my hands."

"Where?" Glen shouted, leaning over the counter. "Where was he?"

"In the hole in the river—the place you told me about." Willard stammered. He tore a fishing pole out of Murdock's hands and threw a bill on the counter. "He pulled nearly fifty feet of line into the hole and then jerked the rod away. Boy oh boy, that's one fish I'm going to catch!"

He vanished in a minute, the door slamming behind him. Ten men sat there stupified for a long moment.

"I don't believe it," Lem Jenson said at last. "Ain't no human ever caught a fish in that river for twenty years."

"Well, I ain't takin' no chances!" Glen Murdock snapped. He flopped his hat on his head and snatched a pole from the counter. "If there's a fish to be took from that river, I'm goin' to take it."

"Now you wait for me, Glen Murdock!" Lem protested. He too grabbed a pole, and in a scrambled minute all ten men were on their feet, poles in hand and heading for the river.

They cut across Cal Clemens' patch of land, grimly determined to get the fish before Willard Thrumpman, with his brand new equipment, made fools out of all of them. Quickly they ducked under the white fence and headed upstream along the bank to the dark spot on the surface.

"He ain't here," Glen said in a surprised tone.

The dark spot seemed to undulate knowingly as they looked about.

"Was he just spoofing us?" Glen asked. Suddenly Lem Jenson seized his arm in a grip of terror.

"Look!" he hissed.

Glen followed the pointed finger with his gaze, then gulped dryly.

On the other bank of the river, opposite the deep hole, lay what was once Willard Thrumpman. All that remained was his chubby, round head and his booted feet—in between was only his skeleton, each bone picked clean and white.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

All about her the skulls shrieked madly

THE SINGING SKULLS

By DON WILCOX

MURIEL never hoped to be queen, yet when the skulls sang, her dream came true — but there was a penalty!

AMONG the vast red rock caverns, a ten-year-old child like Neeka could easily lose her way if she strayed too far from the underground city. Fortunately, Muriel had taken the little orphan under her wing. Muriel was nineteen.

"You must never come this far alone," Muriel would warn her as they explored new tunnels in search of food. "We're a long way from home."

"I'm tired, Muriel," the little girl complained. "Isn't there any shorter way home?"

So today they tried a shortcut. Soon the passage narrowed until the flames of their torches touched the red rock ceiling, and Muriel's flowing blonde hair sometimes brushed the walls.

They were about to turn back when a flickering red light appeared only a few yards ahead. At once their tunnel opened into a circular rock chamber. There, before a pit of sputtering yellow lava and red flame, stood a grizzled little old man.

"Who is he?" Neeka whispered.

"S-s-sh!" Muriel held the child's hand. "We shouldn't have come here."

"How do you know?"

"My conscience tell me."

"My conscience doesn't tell me anything," the little child said innocently. "I want to stay and watch him."

For a long moment they lingered. Their eyes adjusted to the weird red flames. The details of this shadowy room became clear-cut. The little old man didn't see them. He was too busy puttering around the flames of the pit.

In his wrinkled red hand he held a long, crooked wire, heavy enough to stir the sputtering lava as one might stir a kettle of bubbling broth. He didn't mind the fumes that wafted up from the glowing coals.

"I've seen him once before," Muriel whispered. "He came to the festival last year. He's a hermit."

"He's talking to himself," said little Neeka. "What does it mean?"

"I wonder."

At that moment a liquid bubble rose out of the pit and floated upward, slowly, slowly, toward the domed ceiling. It glistened with running colors like a soap bubble, and it grew larger and larger until it was as big as a bucket.

Then—pop!

The bubble broke into a thousand splinters of light, and out of it fell—*a skull.*

The skull floated downward as slowly as the bubble had floated up. Its narrow jaws yawned and it gave forth a thin-voiced cry.

"Gheeeee-aaaah-gawwww-yup!"

It struck the surface of the lava, choked off, and sank.

"Oh!" Neeka cried out before Muriel could stop her. The old man turned. He came toward them slowly, dragging

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the wire with red hot end so that it made sparks beside his bare feet.

Muriel snatched up the two torches, handed one to Neeka, and started to run with her. They sprinted down the tunnel—

Clannnnk! A metal wall fell before them. Their escape was closed. A hidden mechanism, operated from a lever in the circular room, had made them prisoners.

Muriel caught a tense breath. She went back to face her captor. Her heart pounded. She felt as innocent and helpless as Neeka, even though she was the child's guardian.

"Must you be frightened?" The little old man spoke in a thin, cackling voice.

MURIEL couldn't answer. He was so strange in appearance, as if his half naked body had taken on the qualities of the lava pool. His face and shoulders and chest bore a thousand wrinkles, glowing like fire. His twisted locks of hair were like coiled ribbons of brass.

His eyes shone at her, deep and fierce and mysterious, under great eyebrows that were likewise twisted ribbons of brass, as were his whiskers. It was hard to guess whether he was scowling or smiling.

Another bubble floated up from the lava pool, and now a purplish-white skull floated down gently, and he caught it on his fingertips and held it. Its jaw fell open and it began to cry like a dying animal.

Muriel was trying hard not to be frightened. But now she heard Neeka sobbing.

"Aren't you ashamed, scaring a little girl?"

"I have so few visitors. I didn't want you to run away so soon." There was something plaintive in the old man's voice. He looked at Neeka, disturbed by her crying, yet seemingly unaware that the whine of the skull was an unnatural thing that might frighten anyone. "Is this your little sister?"

"She is Neeka," said Muriel. "I've taken her to be my child."

"Neeka—oh!" The brassy-whiskered old man tossed the skull deftly and caught it between the teeth. It ceased to cry. Then Neeka stopped her sobbing. The old man said, "Neeka—too bad, too bad. Does she know the tragedy of her parents?"

"S-s-sh! I try to protect her, so she'll never be reminded," Muriel said. She was surprised that this hermit should know all about the tribal happenings.

He repeated his words of sympathy. "Too bad, too bad. Twenty-five thousand of us *Dobberines,* and not one of us has the nerve to defy the Evil Heart Ceremony . . . Come here, little girl, let me talk with you."

He tossed the skull back into the sputtering pit and started toward Neeka, dragging the heavy wire, now hooked onto his metal belt.

Muriel stepped in his path, and he stopped before her. The cackle of his voice was harsh with impatience. "I'm not going to frighten her. Believe me, I know about her misfortunes. I could prove to her that her father was innocent. There was no reason to sacrifice him. Much less reason for her mother to commit—"

"Please!" Muriel cried. "Don't! I beg you, don't say any more to her."

The little lava man's great eyebrows raised. He stared, silent, hurt.

"I was trying to help," he said slowly. "I have ways to *prove* what no one else knows. My skulls—"

"Please let us go," Muriel pleaded through tears that she couldn't hold back. Little Neeka's tragedy, her moth-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

er's suicide from grief after her father was sacrificed, must not be recalled to the child's mind. To Muriel, the happiness of Neeka meant more than anything. "Please—"

"Good-bye," the Lava man said abruptly. He stalked to the lever, hooked it with the heavy wire. The latticed door across the tunnel lifted into the ceiling. "Come back if you ever need me . . . Good-bye."

As Muriel and Neeka hurried away, they heard the weird songs of the floating skulls fading in the distance.

CHAPTER II

Irlinza Needs Jewels

IRLINZA saw Muriel and Neeka returning to the city that day. She saw them approaching the footbridge at the rear of the palace. She touched a button to signal to the bridge guard. The bell tinkled, the guard jumped to his feet and obediently bent to the crank. The footbridge lifted so that no one could cross.

Irlinza, watching from the palace roof garden, laughed to see how much trouble she caused the two weary hikers. They were forced to take the long way around.

"Did you mean to do that?" a servant asked timidly. After all, Irlinza was only a luncheon guest. Her act was purely malicious.

"I have to amuse myself somehow," said Irlinza. "Why not amuse oneself at the expense of a 'nobody' like Muriel?"

"Is she a nobody, Miss Irlinza?" the servant asked submissively.

"Her father was a moss-gatherer."

"I've heard," said the servant, "that she may enter the Moss Festival beauty contest this year."

Irlinza mocked. "A sweet chance she'd have. The *Dobberking* doesn't even know her. And after all, he is the one who chooses."

"His royal workers vote, you know —"

"Vote or no vote, the Dobberking makes the choice," Irlinza said emphatically. "That's why I'll be the queen again this year. Get me some more dessert."

Of the twenty-five thousand people in this cavernous world—the kingdom of the Dobberines—Irlinza was one of the most ambitious for wealth and royal privileges.

She was already a celebrity. She had won the beauty contest for the last two years. She had been the favorite luncheon guest of the young bachelor ruler known as the Dobberking.

Irlinza was twenty, a brunette of slinky curves. Her wardrobe was a subject of much gossip among the Dobberine women. Metal mesh was the standard material for wearing apparel for both men and women. But Irlinza also possessed dresses made of supple-bark products brought down from the storm-thrashed surface of this planet, high above the caverns.

Irlinza's eyelashes were so long and beautiful that the court poet continually wrote poems about them. But Irlinza never read these poems. Reading was a bore to her. Besides, the flutter of her long lashes was for the Dobberking, not for any addle-brained poet.

The Dobberking had been in one of his frequent bad humors today. He had hurried away from lunch to take care of the affairs of state. Left to her own devices, Irlinza sat at the roof garden table, absent-mindedly gazing down the cavern valley to where Muriel and little Neeka found a place to leap across the narrow stream. Again she laughed, then her mind darted to the problem at hand.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Neeka's jewels," Irlinza said to herself. Her eyes narrowed. "Today —"

The servant was at her side.

"Did you call for something, Miss Irlinza?"

"Er—how soon does the Dobberking expect his royal workers to return?"

"In three or four days, Miss. Then the Moss Festival will begin at once. Are you already for the contest?"

IRLINZA didn't answer. Secretly she was thinking of the new costume she expected to wear. Jewels—the cavern's finest. She watched little Neeka and her guardian climb the sloping path toward the farther side of the cavern city . . . Jewels . . .Three or four days . . .

"I'll go now," said Irlinza. "But first, bring me the silver cheese-moss knife that the Dobberking was showing me."

"I'm not sure whether I should, Miss—"

"Bring it to me. I'll wait on the porch steps."

She sauntered to the front of the roof garden. Immediately before the palace was the sentry house carved in the outcropping rock ridge that formed the shape of a question mark. The dot-end of the question mark was a six-foot onyx stalagmite that had come to be used for a sacrifice post.

There was where Neeka's father had been tied, in last year's Evil Heart Ceremony, when the floods were rushing down.

Beyond the palace plaza lay the sprawling city on the upward slope of the cavern floor—a few thousand water-tight clay mounds with glass windows. Most of the windows were lighted, at present; for it was mid-day, and thousands of torches burned.

Days and nights were a part of the Dobberine's well ordered existence in this world of a thousand caves. Written legends traced the origin back to the habits of earlier ancestors who had lived on the outside of another planet called the earth. The red rock walls of Onyx City, the capitol, glowed with a profusion of torches through the day time, and the waters of the subterranean streams chased noisily through the crevasses.

But at night the caverns were darkened, and the noisier streams were choked off for ten hours, to provide ideal conditions for sleep.

Only the lonely farmers — those moss-gatherers who lived apart in the various dark branch caves, could ignore the system of night and day. Many of them were said to sleep the greater half of their lives away. However, at such occasions as the annual Moss Festival or, later, the Evil Heart Ceremony, which came with the yearly rush of floods, all the population of these caverns gathered in to share the excitement of the city.

The servant met Irlinza on the porch steps. "I'm sorry, Miss. The Dobberking says the beautiful cheese-moss knife must be saved for the winner of the beauty contest."

"He's just being spiteful," she said angrily. "There's no reason he shouldn't give it to me now."

She wandered out across the palace plaza. Ubolt, the burly guard in the red and black chain-metal uniform, was sitting in his easy chair on the sentry house roof.

"What's new, my famous beauty?"

"If there's anything new, you should know it," she retorted.

IT WAS a fact that Ubolt, with his gift for gossip and time on his hands, kept a vulture's eye on the comings and goings of the kingdom. His sta-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion was an ideal vantage point. Carved out of the hook of the rocky question mark, it overlooked the palace plaza, the business streets and metal shops, the childrens' playgrounds, and the mound-shaped residences.

"I suppose you've picked out a costume for the contest?" said Ubolt.

"If I had, I wouldn't tell you," said Irlinza.

"Be sure to dazzle the Dobberking," said Ubolt. "When you walk off with the prize, you'll hear a big cheer from the top of this sentry house. That'll be me."

Irlinza threw a kiss to Ubolt and went on her way.

She crossed the town and came to the house of Neeka. It stood at the end of the street where the cavern floor and roof came together. She found the little girl playing along the narrow cliff path, watching the silver birds fly over.

"Neeka, my darling."

"Hello," said Neeka.

"I've come to see you, my dear. Do you remember me? I used to be a friend of your mother. She would often show me her beautiful beads and bracelets."

Neeka shook her head slowly. "I don't remember that."

"Who takes care of you these days, Neeka? Do you have any friends besides Muriel? . . . What a lovely old house . . . Is anyone at home?"

"What do you want?" Neeka faced her stubbornly.

"Come, sit down with me here on the step," Irlinza said, brushing the little girl's hair. "You are very charming. Some day I'd like to take you to the Dobberking's palace."

"I don't like palace people," Neeka said innocently. "Today someone raised the bridge so we couldn't get across."

"Oh, that's too bad."

"Muriel takes me on long walks," said the little girl. "We see wonderful sights. And we never tell anyone. You'd never guess the sights we see or the sounds we hear . . . Aren't you the lady who wins the beauty contests?"

Irlinza smiled. "Would you like for me to win again, Neeka? Think how beautiful I would look in your mother's jewels . . . Would you like for me to try them on?"

Diamonds, rubies, emeralds—beautiful necklaces, bracelets and tiaras—these were the pictures that floated through Irlinza's mind as she strove to win little Neeka's confidence.

"If you want to see the jewels," Neeka said simply, "you may come in. Muriel is trying them on right now."

Irlinza rose in surprise. "Muriel? Why?"

"She's going to wear them in the contest. I told her she could."

"What! Muriel *She*—"

"I think she's the most beautiful person in the world."

"Oh, Neeka, you poor little dear. Why, the Dobberking wouldn't even look at her."

Just then the door opened and Irlinza's jealous eyes beheld Muriel, dressed in a dazzling white party dress, bedecked with rubies and emeralds.

"NOW, Neeka, how do I—oh!" Muriel caught her breath to find Irlinza here on the porch. "Oh—hello."

"Well, *well.*" Irlinza drew herself up haughtily. She walked back and forth as if inspecting a model. "How *very* glamorous. And you, a moss-gatherer's daughter! What's the occasion? A wedding?"

"I was thinking of entering the contest—"

"Indeed!" Irlinza's lips curled in a cynical smile. "And do you think the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dobberking will be impressed by jewels —*borrowed* jewels?"

Little Neeka, bright-eyed, seized her opportunity. "But *you* came to borrow them yourself."

Irlinza's face tightened. She hated that meddlesome child.

No ten-year-old girl was going to cross her path. In a saccharine voice she said, "Isn't that *innocence* for you. Neeka thought I wanted to borrow the jewels."

"And didn't you?" Muriel was plainly puzzled.

"Certainly not," Irlinza lied. "I'd heard the rumor that you were going to enter the contest and I only wanted to make sure. You see I'll be much surer of winning if you do."

"I don't quite understand," said Muriel.

"The Dobberking hates jewelry. Irlinza's sarcastic smile played its full power upon the bewildered Muriel. "I do hope you'll wear lots of jewels in the contest."

CHAPTER III

The Moss Carnival

THE silver birds flew along the cavern ceilings migrating to new sources of food. Jaff, the fleet-footed young messenger of the royal palace, came running back to Onyx City with the news that the royal gatherers of cheese-moss were returning.

Through the night they came, several hundreds of them, the royal brigade of workmen. Their two-wheeled carts, heavily laden with heaps of cheese-moss as thick as sod, rumbled along the cavern thoroughfares. There would be food aplenty in storage when the annual floods rushed down through these subterranean chambers to wash the last of the old crop away. Cheese-moss was the most important item of the Dobberine diet.

The Festival began with the spectacle of a colorful parade and ended with the tense excitement of choosing the queen of beauty. Muriel was always thrilled by the gay pageantry of these occasions. Now, for the first time, her own beauty was a part of the parade.

She rode with nine other girls. Their float was decorated with moss blossoms—pink, white and yellow. Moving slowly through the crowds, she caught sight of her friends waving at her. Little Neeka's eyes danced with delight as she ran along beside the float.

"Be sure to win!" Neeka called.

Muriel nodded her head, smiling. She wouldn't win, of course. Not with Irlinza and other court favorites to compete against.

But it was fun being in the contest, if only for Neeka's sake. It had been Neeka's idea more than her own. This lovely white party dress, these jewels that hung lightly at her breasts, had once been worn in this festival by Neeka's mother. Today amid the gaiety, a few spectators would recall the tragedy of last year's Evil Heart Ceremony.

Far across the crowd Muriel saw the little Lava Man. What an oddity. Of all these thousands of gayly dressed people, here was one who paid no attention to the parade. Half naked, he was lying on a red stone, like a lazy lizard that sleeps against a background of protective coloration. When the metal rhythm instruments began to beat a stirring band march, he didn't even look up.

"Get back in line, Muriel."

Muriel winced. She was quite in line, she thought, as she glanced along the row of nine other girls.

It was Irlinza who had spoken. This

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was the third time since the parade began that Irlinza made an occasion to bawl her out. Graciously, Muriel said nothing.

The parade halted. One by one, the ten girls stepped down from the float, escorted by a uniformed official, and marched up the steps of the palace.

MURIEL was the last one in the line. Suddenly she realized that a great many people were gazing at her individually. Noskin, a brisk important little palace official with a face like a bird, batted his eyes twice. He touched his sash and bowed as if the Dobberking were passing. The unexpectedness of this gesture made Muriel smile.

Next, she caught the eye of Ubolt, the burly guard, who sat in his easy chair atop the sentry house. He had thrown a kiss to Irlinza when she passed. Now he stood and tossed kisses to Muriel with both hands.

Just as she was starting up the steps, Jaff, the royal messenger, slender and handsome and fiery-eyed, stopped her long enough to pin an ornament on her shoulder. This was slightly irregular. The official who was conducting her coughed with impatience. But the Dobberking himself was smiling down indulgently upon this little interruption.

It was a lovely ornament — an award that Jeff had once received as the champion footracer of the tribe. Now it pressed cool against her shoulder, a miniature silver foot with wings.

"I'm giving you this for luck," Jaff said, smiling.

Giving it to her! An effusion of delight filled her—a quickening sense of popularity. The crowds were cheering as she, the last of the contestants, marched across the palace porch.

Nor did she fail to catch the gleam of interest from the Dobberking himself. He was a masterful young bachelor of thirty, short and stocky. His solid head—wide cheekbones and heavy jaw—reminded her of a chunk of stone with two hot torchlights for eyes. The shining metal mesh of his ornamental vest seemed to swell as he drew a deep breath.

Muriel took her place in the line. She tried not to notice the jealous glance from Irlinza. She looked to the crowds. How they were cheering! Her head swam with a strange dizziness. So many of them were applauding her, as if they loved her.

"You're going to win, Muriel!" came the shrill little voice of Neeka from the front of the crowd.

But no. Muriel didn't really want to win. This was enough—this dizzying sensation of being a part of the contest, being cheered, receiving favors—

She clutched the winged ornament at her shoulder. That had been the award of a champion.

Now the votes were being taken, according to the custom. The royal moss gatherers marched, single file, across the porch in front of the line of beauties. Each moss-gatherer whispered his vote to the Dobberking. No votes were recorded in writing. The Dobberking simply "remembered" when his royal workers preferred.

THE stocky, square-jawed Dobberking marched forward to announce the decision. He extended a hand, as he walked down the line of candidates. Irlinza started to step forward. But the Dobberking walked past her. Muriel saw the high color that leaped to her cheeks, saw her turn white with rage. But the Dobberking didn't notice.

He came straight to Muriel, took her by the hand, led her to the center of the porch. He lifted her to a pedestal

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that formed a part of the porch railing.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the Dobberine Kingdom, I give you, as the festival queen of the year—Muriel!"

The cheering was like the thunder of an approaching flood.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the ruler went on, "this is the first time that Muriel has competed in the festival contest, but from the acclaim you have given her, I know you hope it will not be the last time.

"To win this honor is also to win certain responsibilities. You all remember, the beauty queen plays her part in the Evil Heart Ceremony . . ."

The speech went on, but Muriel had ceased to hear anything. She was almost helpless against this sudden flood tide of popularity. She was the beauty queen! *She was the beauty queen—the queen! — the queen! — the queen—*

A skull! Her eyes grew wide. She was looking over the heads of the crowd. The little old Lava Man was watching her from a distance. He lifted one of his red arms to the level of his wrinkled, glowing shoulders. A skull appeared on his fingertips. A purplish-white skull.

But it didn't stay there. It came floating slowly over the head of the people, straight toward Muriel. Closer, closer, until it was near enough to touch.

She started to draw back, as if a bird floating slowly over the heads of the Dobberking didn't notice; he went on speaking. Neither did the crowd see it.

But it was real, it was there, it was singing to her, speaking words in a soft resonant voice.

"Muriel-l-l . . . Muriel-l-l . . . This honor-r-r. This honor-r-r . . . Do not let it defeat-t-t you-u-u."

The skull whirled twice around her head. Its jaws clicked like stones. It sailed back across the crowd, back to the little old man's fingertips, and disappeared. And Muriel, the Festival queen, was left staring, speechless, oblivious to the thousands of Dobberines who were cheering for her.

CHAPTER IV

Rehearsal for Sacrifice

IT WOULD have been wonderful being the beauty queen if there hadn't been so many complications. Nothing like this had ever happened to Muriel before. Smiles from everyone. Praise from people she didn't even know. And gifts!

Just imagine buxom Aunt Friel coming home from her day's work at the palace, bringing a heaping tray of the finest cheese-moss, fruits and fish.

"Compliments to the queen of beauty," said Aunt Friel, bubbling over with pleasure and good humor, "from the palace servants."

"How lovely!" Muriel exclaimed. "I never dreamed this would happen to me."

"All you have to do is stand up and be beautiful, and they pile the groceries right at your feet. It's the funniest way I ever heard of earning a free dinner." Aunty Friel laughed until she shook all over.

Little Neeka danced around with joyous excitement. "I'm going to be beautiful when I grow up too."

But Muriel tried not to be swept away by all this good fortune. Whenever she had a moment of quiet thought, the image of the singing skull came back to her, and she remembered its warning.

Could her good fortune last? She wondered. Through her school days, life had never been easy for her. Her home had been one of poverty. She

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had had to fight hard for her few successes.

When she had won certain scholastic honors, she had found herself very popular—but the popularity had never lasted. After all, she was Muriel, the daughter of a poor moss-gatherer. She couldn't dress in the finery that was required by the upper social levels. Her good times had been the simple times: gathering moss blossoms with her good friend Jaff, playing nurse-maid to little Neeka.

But now Neeka was hers to keep, and Neeka had been a child of wealth.

"I'm going to give you some jewels for your own," Neeka said. "They look so pretty on you."

"No, Neeka, you musn't do that."

Muriel wondered. Should she accept a few? Would the people say she had attached herself to this child to get a share of her wealth? But no, they couldn't say that. It simply wasn't true.

THROUGH the streets came the town criers calling for volunteer laborers. Soon the floods would come. The last supplies of cheese-moss, left in stacks in distant caves, must be brought in at once. How many men and women would volunteer to help?

Muriel picked up a pair of work gloves and hurried out to the street. Here was a patriotic service she could perform.

"No, not you," said the crier. "You're the beauty queen."

"But I should help. My father and mother always helped with the cheese-moss harvest. They even made trips to the surface and braved the storms for supple-bark and fruit. They were proud to work with their hands."

"We can't accept you," the crier said. "It's not only that your hands are too beautiful; many good workmen might be distracted if the queen of beauty were along. Good-bye, Miss Muriel."

Curious incidents of this sort occurred almost every hour of the day. All at once Muriel was forced to assume a new personality. She couldn't dodge this wave of popularity.

A messenger from the Dobberking knocked at her door the day after the Festival. He presented her with a slender blue-metal box.

"With the Dobberking's compliments. A silver cheese-moss knife."

"Oh, how pretty." Muriel lifted the gleaming blade as if she were handling precious stones. "But I could never use it to gather cheese-moss. It's too bright and beautiful. Are you sure it's proper for me to accept it?"

The messenger laughed. "If you knew how much one of the other girls wanted it, you wouldn't hesitate."

"Irlinza?"

"How did you guess it? That sister wants everything. Most of all she wants the Dobberking. But since the contest, she's been in a rage."

"I'm sorry."

The messenger went on his way laughing to himself. But Muriel was sincere. For in a way she wished Irlinza had won.

She was still standing on the steps, holding the blue-metal box, when Jaff came running along the cliff path. As usual, he was on an official errand for the palace. But he took a moment to stop and look at her new gift.

"What a beauty of a knife?" It's a knockout, Muriel. Gee, I wish I could give you something nice like that."

"Why, Jaff, you gave me your own championship pin. That's the nicest gift I ever received in my life."

"Honest?" His large brown eyes were bright with boyish eagerness.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Do you really like it?"

"I'll wear it to all the ceremonies as long as I live," Muriel said.

"Gee, thanks. Well, I've got to hurry on. The Dobberking will be in a fever to know how much more cheese-moss is coming in."

Yes, Muriel would wear Jaff's winged pin at every public occasion. The Evil Heart Ceremony was just around the corner. She would wear it then. A shudder of uncertainty filled her whenever she thought of this occasion. It was the one tribal ritual that she had always dreaded—even before Neeka's father had fallen victim to it.

NOSKIN, the palace record keeper, was her next official visitor. He was knocking at everyone's door these days, collecting data for the Evil Heart Ceremony.

He was an important little man with a bird-like face and quick dark eyes. He walked in and made himself very much at home. He commented on the luxurious furniture that Neeka's parents had left. He was fascinated, too, by the sight of the silver moss-knife. Then he turned his attention to her. It wasn't easy for a face like his to smile, but he made an effort to accomplish the feat.

"I don't know why I should come here searching for Evil Heart evidence," he said. "Anyone knows that our new beauty is incapable of any evil. But you know how it is. We officials are paid by the number of calls we make. I'm canvassing every house."

"That must be dreadful," Muriel said.

"Why?"

"Because wherever you go, the people know you're looking for the most evil heart in the kingdom. Whenever you look at anyone, it makes that person wonder whether he may be sacrificed to the flood."

"No, no, no. You take it too seriously." He patted Muriel's hand. And being rather pleased with himself, he repeated, "You take it much too seriously," and patted her hand again. He moved his chair closer to hers. "Pleasant here, isn't it?"

She rose abruptly. "You were telling me about how you choose the most evil heart, Mr. Noskin."

"Yes, yes, yes." He quickly resumed his business-like manner. "It's very simple when you know how. I always put my prospect at ease by saying, 'How are your neighbors behaving? Do you have any neighbors that might be candidates for the sacrifice?' You'd be surprised what any man is willing to tell about his neighbor. Don't worry, I'll have a nice little bookful of evidence on tap when it comes for the crowd to make nominations."

He gathered up his record books. In the doorway he paused and Muriel saw that he was again practicing his smile on her.

"You're very timid, Miss Muriel. It wouldn't hurt you to make acquaintance of some of us influential officials. Now take someone like me. I'm not more than twice your age, and some people have actually said I'm handsome."

Muriel smiled with amusement in spite of herself. "Are you officials paid for the number of social calls you make?"

This may have angered Noskin, for he mumbled and floundered. Then abruptly he started off. On the porch steps he stopped, turned, took a letter from his pocket.

"I almost forgot to give you this," he said. "Ubolt, the guard, is probably waiting for you."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BEFORE the record keeper's sullen footsteps had echoed away, Muriel was hurrying down the long grade to the palace plaza. For the letter was an official notice to report for a rehearsal of the Evil Heart Ceremony.

"Where you been?" Ubolt called down from his sentry station. "The officials have already rehearsed. The show's over. You got left out, good-looking."

The accusation struck sharp. Muriel didn't know how to answer. She couldn't explain that Noskin had tried to get friendly and almost forgotten his official business. No, that would never do.

"I'm sorry I'm late." Then a flash of hope came to her. "Do you mean I won't have to take part?"

"I mean nothing of the kind. There's only one person that ever has the honor of tying the victim to the post and that's the beauty queen. Come on, we'll go through your part of it right now."

He descended from his roof station, and invited Muriel to follow him into the sentry house. It gave Muriel a strange feeling to be coming into this place. All her life she had walked around this question mark shaped ridge of stone. This was the first time she had ever seen inside. Its hollow interior was like a curved stone. While the guard puttered around gathering together some ropes, she gazed out the wide, low window for a sentry's eye view of the city. The right corner of her view was blocked by the six-foot onyx stalagmite—the dot-end of the question mark—the death post for the Evil Heart victims.

SUDDENLY a horror gripped her. There was where Neeka's father had gone to his death. Within a few days Muriel would be forced to tie someone else to that post, to go to his death. and twenty-five thousand people would applaud her for her act.

"Are you listening to what I'm telling you?" Ubolt said harshly.

"I—I'm ill," said Muriel. "Please. I may not be able to—I'd like to be excused from taking part. Do you think the Dobberking would excuse me—"

"Aw, stop it!" Ubolt growled. "None of that weak-kneed stuff. The beauty queen always does the tie-up act. Now watch sharp what I'm telling you. See this rope?"

It was a thick, ten-foot fibre rope. Ubolt made her practice swinging the end of it.

"I don't know a thing about tying knots," she said.

"No woman knows how to tie a knot. But we have a way to take care of that. See this bucket of honey-glue? It's the same dope the valley folks use to seal their doors against the flood. All you have to do is swing the rope around the victim. It'll wrap around itself with a grab like a vise, see?"

"I—I guess so." Yes, she remembered, that was the way they had done with Neeka's father last year. Irlinza had officiated.

"Well, you'd better practice it once or twice."

"No . . . No . . . I'll be able to—please don't make me."

"Come on. You've got to be prepared. Sometimes you get a victim that squirms and hollers, and you have to whip that rope around in a hurry. Sometimes you get a victim that goes dizzy on you and falls away in a dead faint with his tongue hangin' out—what the devil's the matter with you, girl?"

"I—I—" Muriel reeled dizzily and fell to the floor in a faint.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAPTER V

Terrors of the Night

SUCH dreams! Such hideous hallucinations. Innocent people being tied to the post. Innocent people with skulls for heads. Skulls, skulls, skulls! Skulls that floated like bubbles. Skulls that sang. Skulls that whispered. Skulls that taunted, and growled and screamed. Yet all in dreams. Muriel awoke in a cold sweat. She lay awake, listening for the faint signal bell from the plaza that announced the hour. The night was less than half gone. She must restore her feverish body with sleep.

Neeka called to her through the darkness.

"Muriel, did you hear someone walking around the house?"

"No, dear. Go back to sleep."

For a little while Neeka was silent. Then, "Muriel, I heard someone.

"It was just your imagination, dear."

Then all was quiet. Soon the slow rhythmic breathing from Neeka's room told Muriel that the child had gone back to sleep. Aunt Friel, too, was sleeping peacefully.

As Muriel lay awake, the details of the frightening dream came back to her. At once she wondered whether the dream skulls had been the same skulls as those of the lava pit. No, there was a difference. It was as if they were the distorted dream images of those real skulls from the Lava Man.

But now she remembered that, at the last of the dream, skulls had been dropping, one after another, with a rhythmic *crunch, crunch, crunch.* The rhythm of footsteps!

Yes, she *had* heard it. Neeka was right, there had been footsteps. Slow, heavy ones that had woven into her dreams. Someone had been prowling.

Who? Why? Did she have any enemies?

One answer came clear. If there was someone in this kingdom who knew he might be tied to the post by her in the forthcoming ceremony, he might come intending to kill her. Cold terror shot through her heart.

Fear makes people do unaccountable things. Muriel now thought of a weapon. She could get the silver knife, hide it under her pillow.

In the darkness, she crossed the living room. She groped along the wall. She knew the very spot where it hung. The flat of her hand reached out to press down upon the cool surface of the blade.

Even as she touched it, the *blade moved.* It lifted away from her touch. It was gone in the darkness.

Crunch, crunch, crunch. The swift heavy footsteps thumped across the dark room. The front door swung open, the prowler bolted out. Muriel's stifled scream gave him a burst of speed. He didn't bother to slam the door. He raced noisily out into the night.

Muriel bounded to the door, watched the shadow figure slip through a short alley and cut across to the cliff path. Only a fleet-footed person like Jaff would be able to overtake a man in the maze of tunnels along that path. Had he taken the one thing he wanted?

Muriel struck a torch. The knife was gone, all right. Whoever the thief was, she thought, wouldn't dare come back after narrowly escaping detection. If only she had lighted a torch before going into the living room.

She hurried through the house to seek other evidences of plundering. None of the jewels had been touched. The silver knife was what the thief wanted, and that was what he had taken.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SHE hastily dressed in street clothes. She made certain that Neeka and Aunt Friel were still sleeping. Then she slipped out of the house and ran down the long grade to the plaza to tell the sentry what had happened.

The night bell softly tinkled the hour, to break the plaza stillness. The faint sounds of chasing rivulets echoed dimly from distant caves.

"Guard!" Muriel called. "Guard! Where are you?"

Her own voice frightened her, echoing back from the ghostly white palace steps. She had never seen the city so empty.

Where was the guard? The roof station over the sentry house was not occupied. This was strange. Muriel knew that either Ubolt or one of the other guards was supposed to be always on duty.

Now someone within the palace brought a light to the front entrance and stared out to see who was calling.

"What's the matter, out there?"

The voice was familiar, but for a moment Muriel couldn't think whose it was. She talked rapidly, almost incoherently. She needed a guard to keep some mysterious marauder away.

When the man at the head of the steps replied, she realized she was talking with Noskin, the record keeper. He was annoyed over being awakened.

"There are plenty of guards to take care of your troubles," Noskin growled "Take your troubles to the sentry house and quit bothering the palace. Who are you, anyhow?"

"I'm Muriel." She ascended a few steps so that the torchlight revealed her face.

Noskin's anger melted. "Oh—*you!*"

"I'll try at the sentry house again," she said. "Sorry I wakened you."

"Not at all, not at all. Don't go away. I'll be back in a moment. I'll be delighted—delighted."

"No, thank you."

As she hurried back across the city alone, this conversation with Noskin kept disturbing her. She hadn't meant to be unkind. But her refusal of his courtesy must have angered him again. All in all, she doubted whether he could be relied upon to report this matter to the palace authorities. She would try to find Ubolt after the new day's torches were lighted.

The front door of her house was open. She couldn't remember whether she had left it that way.

Aunty Friel was slumbering peacefully. But Neeka—*where was Neeka?*

She wasn't in her bed. She wasn't in the house. Muriel, with torchlight in hand, ran from one room to another.

"Neeka! Neeka! Where are you?"

Aunt Friel roused up, and her sleepy face at once reflected Muriel's terror.

Two next door neighbors came over to see what the fuss was all about.

"I knew something was wrong when I heard that child's voice," one of them said. "But I didn't have the presence of mind to see what was up."

"You heard Neeka? Where? When? What did she say?"

"She was crying," said the neighbor. "It sounded like someone was taking her away in an awful hurry. They went south on the cliff path."

"What does this all mean?" Muriel gasped.

"It means," said Aunt Friel, "that our little Neeka has been kidnaped."

CHAPTER VI

Breakfast with the Dobberking

A LOST child! Of all the terrors that beset the cavernous world of the Dobberines, none was so much dreaded as this. For the caves spread

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their hundreds of arms farther than any explorer knew, and in any cave there were literally thousands of places where a child might hide away and fall asleep.

"You know these tragedies are not uncommon, Miss Muriel," the Dobberking said the following morning. "Only last year two children strayed away and stumbled into a pitfall."

"But this is *different*, your majesty." With tears in her eyes, Muriel pleaded her case to the Dobberking. "Neeka wasn't a child to stray away by herself. *I tell you she was kidnaped.*"

The Dobberking munched his cheese-moss breakfast thoughtfully. He looked out across the roof garden, southward along the dimly lighted valley. He was not in a good humor. His sleep had been disturbed. Grudgingly he had admitted her for this breakfast conference.

"Please, your majesy," Muriel tried to restrain her imploring voice. "If you'll allow some of your guards to question my neighbors, they will confirm what I have told you. They heard Neeka being led away. They heard her cry along the cliff path."

"My guards are all busy," said the stony-faced Dobberking. "This comes at a very bad time. The Evil Heart Ceremony must be ready. The flood may rush down on us any day. I have much on my mind."

"Could you spare Jaff? I know he'd be glad to help me. He's so swift—"

"I'll need Jaff every minute to bring the weather reports from the surface."

"Yes, of course." Muriel wept softly. "Do you think they will kill her, your majesty?"

"Of course not. Nobody has any reason to harm her. It's absurd. I'm not convinced that she was kidnaped. I think you've been carried away by a case of nerves." The Dobberking looked at her with stern, cold eyes. "Listen to me, Muriel. The rumor came to me, before you won the contest, that you claim to have seen something very fanciful in the old Lava Man's cave—something about *skulls* that float around and sing."

"Oh!" These words struck her like an accusation of a crime. So that rumor had gone the rounds! Had Neeka told? No, it must have been Aunt Friel; for Muriel had never confided that strange happening to anyone else.

"You see," the Dobberking drove the cruel point home, "anything you think you've seen or heard is subject to some doubt. You're capable of having delusions. This kidnaping notion is just another of your silly fancies. The child will probably return before night.

MURIEL rose weak with anger. "So you're not going to help me?"

"Young lady, I believe you failed to appear for the Evil Heart rehearsal recently."

"Oh, that was because I—"

"No excuses, please. Ubolt has already told me how you conducted yourself when he gave you a private rehearsal. You'd better pull yourself together. You've got to get over this faint-heartedness before the Ceremony. We intend to appease the Flood God with a perfect sacrifice."

"I understand."

"And while we're speaking of your conduct," the Dobberking drubbed his fingers on the table, "Noskin, my recorder, complains that you're not being too friendly to palace officials. In fact, you've been somewhat snobbish. This is not becoming a new beauty queen."

Uncontrollable emotions filled Muriel's throat. Without meaning to, she clutched the Dobberking's arm, clung to him as if she were drowning.

"I don't want to be the beauty

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

queen," she cried. "I hate being the beauty queen. All I want is Neeka. I want Neeka!"

"Shut up, you little baby. You've *got* to be beauty queen." A strange light glittered in his eyes. He caught her by the shoulders, his cruel fingers tightened over her arms like a vise. "You're the beauty queen because I said so. Understand? I *made* you the beauty queen."

Brutally he jerked her into his grasp, pressed his face against hers, forced his sensual kiss upon her. She tried to draw back, but she was too horrified to fight. It was a hideous thing for him to do, when her whole heart was crying for Neeka.

He flung her aside, then, and she fell to the floor. For a few moments she lay there, listening to the gutteral laugh with which he taunted her.

The servant who had witnessed this scene from his station now helped her to her feet and led her away.

CHAPTER VII

Irlinza Bestows a Favor

VOLUNTEER groups scoured the valleys. Jaff, before leaving for his day's journey, had stopped by to give Muriel what comfort he could.

"I'll tell every moss-gatherer I meet," he promised. "Take heart, Muriel. We'll pick up her trail."

"Do you believe me, Jaff, when I tell you she must have been kidnaped? She would never stray away."

"I believe whatever you say," said Jaff. "But why should anyone do it? If the jewels haven't been touched, there must be some reason. Is there anyone you suspect?"

"Irlinza," said Muriel. "I don't dare accuse her, because she's a favorite of the Dobberking. Already he refuses to help me."

Jaff shook his head slowly. "A person in Irlinza's position wouldn't dare do such a thing."

"You're so unsuspecting, Jaff. Do you remember the silver knife the Dobberking gave me?"

"Of course."

"I was told that Irlinza wanted it. She tried to get it before the contest. Does it mean anything to you that it disappeared last night? About an hour before Neeka was taken away, someone entered the house and took that knife."

"Did you tell the Dobberking this?"

"I tried to. He wouldn't listen. He thinks that I have delusions. 'A case of nerves,' he says, and lets it go at that." Jaff frowned. "You say someone entered your house an hour before the kidnaping?"

"Yes. Neeka had heard the footsteps. I was afraid. I went to get the knife. The room was dark, but I knew exactly where I had hung the knife on the wall. Just as I placed my hand over it, someone drew it away. He rushed out of the house with it. I saw his shadowy form as he ran through the alley across to the cliff path. Then he as gone."

"You're sure it was a man?"

"From his size and the weight of his footsteps I'm sure."

"And then you went to the palace to report, and when you came back—"

"Neeka had been taken away," Muriel held back her tears.

"I'll think it over every minute I'm gone," Jaff said. "You let the others do the searching. You get some rest. And don't be too suspicious of Irlinza. I'll tell you why. I happen to know that she has gone out of her way to bestow a favor on you. She has organized a search party."

"Irlinza is doing that for me?" Muriel was doubting her own ears.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"She didn't want to known," Jaff said. "Many people are that way about kindnesses they do. But it's true. She's already sent five servants out on an expedition to scour the southern caverns. So take courage, Muriel. And remember, you're a champion."

MURIEL smiled, and the tears came to her eyes as Jaff kissed her. As soon as he was gone, she went to her room and pinned his winged badge of championship on her shoulder. Somehow it comforted her.

Then she looked out to the cliff path, for she could hear the voice of Aunt Friel calling. Aunt Friel was also on the search.

"Neeka! Neeka! Where are you, Neeka? I've got something for you."

It was heartbreaking and yet comical. Buxom Aunt Friel was carrying a tray of food that she had brought from the palace, and her plaintive call attracted a flock of silver birds. They fluttered down like a gang of thieves; they snatched at the food; they almost upset the tray and Aunt Friel as well, which would have been a sizable upset.

"Go way, go way!" she cried, waving her free arm. "Go find Neeka and I'll give you all the dinner you want." She edged along the narrow cliff tottering like a fat lady on a tight rope, and her calls for Neeka soon blended with the other echoes from farther down the valley.

Muriel couldn't rest. She couldn't stay in her room. The neighbors who came in to comfort her did all that could be done. But Muriel's mind was tortured with thoughts of Dobberking's cruel rebuke, and with the awful uncertainty of Irlinza.

"You'd better stay here and rest," her neighbors advised.

"I must see Irlinza," said Muriel. "I'm going to her house."

"You'll quarrel with her if you do. She's not a person to be trusted."

"That's what I intend to find out."

WHEN one suspects that an enemy has done him a favor, it does something to one's heart. It melts the steel coating that one has built around it. The hardness is always quick to dissolve if the heart is steeped in grief, as Muriel's was this morning.

Two acquaintances stopped her as she was crossing the city, both to tell her, in strictest confidence, that they had heard her rival, Irlinza, had sent out a party of servants to help with the search.

Irlinza was watching from her oval window as Muriel approached. Muriel tried to see a certain tenderness in Irlinza's somewhat dissipated eyes with their long dark lashes. She was undoubtedly an attractive girl. For the first time Muriel stopped to wonder what brutality she may have suffered at the hands of the Dobberking during the past two years of her great popularity.

"Come in, Muriel," Irlinza said as she opened the door. "I'm so sorry about what's happened."

"I came to thank you," Muriel said, "for the generous thing you've done."

"You've heard? It's the least I could do."

"Somehow I feel that I should apologize because—" Muriel groped for words. Just why did she feel apologetic toward Irlinza? "Because I've misjudged you so."

Irlinza received this sentiment with a smile and a careless remark. She made Muriel comfortable and brought her a drink. "We all make mistakes. But I think I can tell you something that will help you. That's why I'm glad you've come. I know you have a great deal of trouble on your hands. And

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it isn't all Neeka. Part of it is the Dobberking."

"Oh—you've talked with him?"

"I just returned from there," said Irlinza. "Let me begin with a question. *Do you believe in dreams?*"

"Why—I—I don't know."

"Well, you mustn't. It's a dangerous habit. It's dangerous to believe in the things you dream while asleep. And far more dangerous to believe what you dream when you're awake."

"I—I don't understand."

"You will," said Irlinza confidently. "I've heard about your experience down in the cave of the Lava Man. Yes, I got it straight from your dear Aunt. She was in quite a talkative and friendly mood one night. Not that I meant to pry."

"She shouldn't have told. That was our secret—Neeka's and mine."

"The Dobberking got it all. That's why he understands you. That's why you must take advice. You mustn't believe that any such fanciful thing ever happened."

"But it did. Neeka and I both *saw* it. There were skulls singing—"

"I can't help you if you talk that way. You're holding onto a delusion, Muriel. A *delusion*. Irlinza tapped her glass on the table to emphasize each syllable of the word. "Now let me ask you, what did Ubolt say to you last night when you came down to the plaza to announce that your silver knife had been stolen?"

"I didn't find Ubolt," said Muriel. "I called, but he wasn't at his sentry post."

"Another delusion," said Irlinza. "He *was* there."

"Oh, but he couldn't have been."

"I tell you, Ubolt was at his post," Irlinza insisted. Any of a dozen people at the palace will tell you so. He saw you walk by, he heard you call, and *he answered you*. But you acted like you didn't see him and walked on past."

MURIEL was trembling. This conversation had brought her to the point that she hardly believed her own senses. "What are you trying to tell me, Irlinza?"

"Simply that your whole story about hearing footsteps and feeling knives slip out of your hand, and hearing Neeka's cry fading along the cliff path are more of the same thing. They're all in your mind. If Neeka has strayed away it's probably because she got tired of your wrought up nerves. I hope it's nothing worse than that. If so, she'll probably be back in a few days."

A knock sounded at the door.

For a moment Irlinza was plainly disconcerted. She didn't know what that knock might mean. But she recovered herself at once, and with supreme poise she said, "Who knows, maybe that's the news that Neeka has already returned."

"Is Muriel here?" came a familiar voice from the front door. It was Aunty Friel. "I want to see Muriel at once."

Muriel crossed toward the door. Irlinza was responding in an uncertain voice. "You seem alarmed. Is there anything wrong?"

"Maybe murder," said Aunty Friel, "but Muriel didn't do it. They can't say she did."

Muriel's heart stopped beating. Her words come breathlessly. "Aunt Friel! Has she been found? Is she dead?"

"Of course she isn't dead." It was Irlinza who answered; then, as if she had caught herself speaking out of turn, she stepped back.

Aunt Friel took Muriel by the hand. "No, she hasn't been found. But I've got to talk with you in private. They can't say these things about you."

Muriel gave Irlinza a parting glance. There was a hint of a strange smile on Irlinza's face. Perhaps it was only her amusement at Aunt Friel. Many per-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sons smiled at Aunty's comical manners.

But Aunt Friel was never more serious than now. She led Muriel away from the plaza toward the chasm where the noisy river all but swallowed up her words.

"They can't say you did it, Muriel. But that's what they are saying. It's spreading all over the city. They say you've planned the whole thing. They say your schemes were laid before you ever became Neeka's guardian. You had your eyes on her mother's wealth—especially after your home was lost in the flood."

"No," Muriel cried. It was true that she and her aunt had moved in, but only after the insistence of the friends of Neeka's parents.

"You wanted her jewels."

"No, no, no."

"But you've waited, they say, until you won all this new popularity, before taking the awful chance—"

"What chance?"

"To get rid of Neeka. To murder her for her wealth."

Suddenly Muriel's pounding heart turned to steel. "Where did this story come from?"

"I—I don't know."

"Did it come from the palace?"

"I guess it did. That's where I first heard it."

Muriel turned and started down the chasm path. She was walking fast, almost running. Aunt Friel couldn't possibly keep up.

"Where are you going, Muriel?"

Muriel called back, just loud enough to hear herself above the chasm stream. "They can't say those things about me. I never dreamed of murdering anyone. I couldn't. Not unless it was —"

"What did you say?" Aunty Friel called after her.

"I don't commit murders and I don't have delusions. But I've seen floating skulls and I've heard them sing. No one can tell me different. I'm going to see them again right now."

CHAPTER VIII

If Muriel Were to Murder——

AFTER a long walk Muriel found the right cave. She wound through the narrow passage, where the flames of her torch touched the red rock ceiling and her flowing blonde hair brushed the walls.

But her visit was doomed to disappointment. The latticed gate was down. There was no way to get through.

She placed the torch back of a rock, and when it's light was no longer in her eyes she could begin to see a little of the lava chamber at the end of the tunnel. Flames were leaping. The lava bubbles were floating upward, bursting with a fine spray of light, and frequently the purplish-white form of a skull could be seen floating downward.

They could be heard continuously. If one were to pass this tunnel casually, he might think the weird noises were simply the fantastic echoes of some babbling subterranean river. But as Muriel listened, she began to catch what she had caught before—the clearly defined singing tones and the bable of distinct syllables.

"Waaaat - cannn - thaaaaa - tooooooo . . ."

Sometimes she could almost distinguish a series of chanted words. But other skull voices would come in over the one she was trying to listen to; or the sputtering of flames would drown out the consonant sounds.

She had watched the scene for several minutes before she made anything out of the dark form lying beside the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lava pit. Now she saw, by the leaping flames, that it was the Lava Man lying there asleep.

"Hello!" she called. "Hellooooo!"

He didn't stir. She called again and again. It was hopeless. Like many of the moss-gatherers who lived away from the city, he probably slept like dead for hours on end.

Once her call apparently attracted one of the skulls, for it started to float out into the tunnel toward her. This frightened her so that she fell silent. How long would she have to wait before he came to life? Hunger and fatigue were on her. She knew where she could find some cheese-moss. A little food, a little rest, perhaps a bit of sleep . . .

When Muriel awoke, it was with the feeling that the skulls had been whispering to her. She saw three of them drifting back from the lattice gate as she arose. By the lava pit the little old man was still sleeping. Muriel's torch had almost burned away. It was high time to start back to the city unless she could find another light.

"Maybe I can overtake a search party," she thought.

Whether it was due to her rest or to something the skulls had chanted to her, Muriel might never know; but the odd fact was that her thoughts began to click, one, two, three. Everything was coming to her, crystal clear.

As she hiked along, she talked to herself.

"Muriel, they've trapped you," she said slowly. "The skull that warned you was right. This good fortune has brought evil down on your head. . . . Evil. . . . *Evil!*"

THE awful word echoed in her ears. The Evil Heart Ceremony. . . . Whom would they choose for the sacrifice? They would choose someone whose evil doings inflamed their imaginations.

Would they choose some poor moss-gatherer? No. Would they choose some metal worker or tradesman who was comparatively unknown? No.

They would choose someone who had recently risen to the pinnacle of popularity—and slipped! Someone whose spectacular rise to fame could be interlocked with a criminal scheme. *Someone who had borrowed jewels to become the beauty queen, and then, intoxicated by her success, had committed murder.*

"The story is already spreading like fire," Muriel said to herself. "By the time I get back to Onyx City someone will be believing it—unless little Neeka can be found alive."

But where did Irlinza fit into this pattern? Was she now a friend who might be counted upon to help turn the tide of this false rumor? Os had she herself started it?

Before Muriel got back to the Onyx Cave she was to learn that her worst fears were justified.

Twice she came within listening range of search parties. Their conversation was highly revealing. A few of the searchers had come out from the city within the past hour, and they brought the knockout story.

"Yes, the circumstantial evidence all points to Muriel as the murderer of Neeka," they would say. "If the body isn't found, the Dobberking will have an easy time deciding who is to be sacrificed."

Muriel's torch had gone out. She sat in the darkness, watching the party move on through the canyon, listening to their ceaseless call of "Nee-eeka! Nee-eeka!"

The steel in Muriel's heart hardened. This was no time for despair. If she yielded before the awful tragedy that was engulfing her, she would be desert-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing Neeka. For Neeka's sake she must fight. For Neeka might still be alive. She might be waiting within some cavern prison, sobbing her little heart out, wondering why Muriel didn't come for her.

"It's a trap," she said aloud. "It's a deadly net woven out of jealousy. And it's meant to catch me—and Neeka—and Neeka's jewels and property. It's a net—and the only way I can escape it is to *cut my way out.*"

She repeated these words slowly, desperately. Then she added, "With a knife."

The steel was welding to a deadly hardness in her heart. What she had been subjected to in these recent hours—the Dobberking's brutality, Irlinza's wily deceptions, the treachery of spreading rumors—flooded through her with the heat of fire, transforming her soft nerves into the toughest steel mesh.

There would be a way to fight this trap. No matter if it cost her her own life. There would be a way. She must think, plan, act.

ANOTHER party passed along within her hearing, and one of the voices struck through her like an electric shock. It was Irlinza. This was Irlinza's rescue party, but they were not calling out for Neeka. They were too much engrossed in their own conversation.

"The Evil Heart Ceremony always follows the same pattern," Irlinza was saying. "When the time comes for the accusing speeches, I'll be ready."

Yes, the routine of the Ceremony, thought Muriel, would give Irlinza every opportunity to win. For the crowds would be excited, and any dramatic accusation would sway them.

The Dobberking would be the one to decide, in the analysis. But in the first place, there would be a call for nominations from the crowd, and at such a time any number of persons might be nominated. It was a common thing for a man to nominate his worst enemy. However, unless he could make a speech that would ignite the hatred of the crowd against that enemy, he usually failed in his purpose.

Once the nominations were made, it was up to Noskin, the record keeper, to check over the evidence against the most prominent candidates. Then—while a crowd waited in awful suspense—he would whisper his recommendation to the Dobberking.

The final steps, then, would be the Dobberking's announcement of the victime. Whether the Dobberking would always choose the person that Noskin recommended was a secret that no one but he and Noskin would ever know.

But as Muriel rehearsed these steps in her mind she saw clearly which step was the key to her fate: it was the speech. That fate was already in the making. For the words of Irlinza that she had just overheard were unmistakable. *"When the time comes for the accusing speeches, I'll be ready."*

Muriel sprang to her feet. The steel of her heart had spread to every nerve of her body. She ran swiftly, silently, along the dark cavern path toward the lights of the rescue party that had just passed.

Now she slackened her pace. Again she could hear the voice of Irlinza. She stopped, and her keen eyes searched the contour of the walls ahead, picking out the hiding places. She dare not approach much closer to the party, for fear the swish of pebbles under her feet would cause them to turn.

The light of five torches was in her face. The shadows of her hand against the rock wavered as the five torch bearers moved along. She needed one of those torches. But more to the point,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she needed one of those persons bearing the torches—needed that person *alone*—within the reach of her own clutching fingers—fingers that could choke a soft throat like Irlinza's.

She skipped silently along to the next hiding place, and the next, and the next.

"Listen!" one of the four servants said. "What did I hear?"

Deadly silence, except for distant echoes of underground streams.

"Nee-eeka! . . . Nee-eeka!" The servant wasted his voice on several calls. He turned to Irlinza. "Do you think she would come this far?"

Irlinza answered impatiently. "Just keep on searching. That's the only way. I'll leave you to your own devices. Yell your throats out if you want to, but don't think you'll hear any answers. Someday someone will find her skeleton in the bottom of a chasm, and then we'll know that Muriel got rid of her, just as I said."

"Aren't you coming with us, Irlinza?"

"I'll have to go back now. The Dobberking wants me to run over my speech. You keep searching, and remember, I'll reward you well if you find her body."

Irlinza turned back, then the party went on.

MURIEL crouched low among the rocks. The light of Irlinza's torch came close, causing the black shadows to bob and bend and turn along the dim red rocks.

Irlinza passed within seven feet of Muriel. Her face was a study. The lips slightly curled in a smile of deceit, her eyes with their long lashes, narrowed against the light.

"The knife!" Muriel's lips formed the words. She held her breath, waited, watched. Yes, it was the same silver moss knife that the Dobberking had given her. The scroll design on the handle could not be mistaken. And now the blade of the knife hung at Irlinza's side.

Muriel stalked her prey. With soft, soundless footsteps she kept pace, hardly ten yards back. Twice she dodged, when Irlinza looked back over her shoulder to make sure the rescue party was moving along.

Then Irlinza slowed her pace, watching furtively from the corner of her eyes, as if half aware that someone among these dark walls might be watching her. She kicked at a pebble, then bent down casually to pick it up.

Muriel bounded toward her. The beat of footsteps caused Irlinza to whirl about. Muriel leaped forward with one swift sure purpose. That knife—it was hers—hers to *use*—

Irlinza reached for it, too, and their fingers locked over the handle. The torch jumped from Irlinza's hand. For an instant the struggle froze.

Irlinza's eyes flashed hatred. "What's the matter with you?"

"You took Neeka! Where is she?"

"Dont' shriek at me, you little fool!"

"Where is she? You'll pay—"

The breathless words were lost in a furious match of strength against strength. Muriel's full force wrenched at the knife, tore it free, hurled it into the air. I fell to the path where, catching the light of the torch, it lay like a slice of red fire.

MURIEL paid dearly for that split second of throwing the knife. Irlinza caught her by her long flowing hair, jerked her off her balance, threw her to the ground. She tried to spring up. She fought at the tight fingers in her hair. Irlinza reached for the torch.

"Beauty queen!" Irlinza sneered. "We'll see."

The torch fluttered as Irlinza's arm swung down. The blaze barely touched

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the ends of Muriel's blonde hair. Slap! Muriel struck out the blaze. She rolled, and Irlinza rolled with her. They were off the path. Their struggling bodies struck a wall rock. The torch tumbled away. They were engulfed in the shadows.

But there was that slice of red light—the silver knife. Muriels' heart thumped like bouncing stones. A stone was in her hand, then, and that hand was free to strike. It lifted.

The light caught it. Irlinza's arm batted against it. The stone humped across the path and plummeted into the chasm beyond.

Again they were rolling, biting, pulling hair, slapping. Toward the chasm. Away from it. Back again. It was a horrible see-saw.

Then Muriel's fingers were tightening on the soft throat. Irlinza was gasping hard.

"Where is Neeka?" Muriel cried. "Where? What did you do with her?"

"Let me up," came Irlinza's sullen snarl.

"Where is she? I'll choke the very life out of you if you don't tell. I'll—"

The knife! Muriel's hand swept it up, her arm lifted it. Its reflected light flashed over Irlinza's terror-filled eyes.

"I'll count to five," Muriel said. "If you refuse to tell me about Neeka, I swear I'll plunge this knife through your black heart. . . . One. . . . Two. . . . Three. . . . Four. . . ."

Irlinza screamed. She must have seen what Muriel saw—a purplish white skull hanging in the air. It had seemingly materialized before their eyes. It was whining within three feet of their ears, louder, louder.

"Nnnn . . . nnnn . . . nnnnaa." It's tone was that of a hurt animal. The word came clearer. "Nnnoo . . . nnooo . . . no! . . . No. Murrrielll, do not killlll."

CHAPTER IX

The Voice of Conscience

"WILL you follow meee, Murielll?" said the skull in a soft, weird, chant. This was no delusion. Even Irlinza knew that. The faint white glow from the floating object fascinated her. Muriel saw her shrink when it moved past her.

The enchanting invitation was more persuasive than any command. Muriel followed. Once she looked back to see Irlinza dissheveled and temporarily defeated. The ex-beauty queen picked up the torch and started off toward the city without a word.

"Forgettt about Irlinnnza," the skull sang. Its voice was a feminine voice, Muriel thought, though it was low-pitched and rich with resonance. At once she felt confident that it was friendly.

It led her back to the chamber of Lava Man. The gate was open. The little brass whiskered old man was wide awake, puttering around the flames with a long wire. The wrinkles of his red face twisted into a smile at the sight of her.

"Welcome, welcome, Miss Muriel. I am very proud to have a beauty queen as my guest."

Muriel felt not at all like a beauty queen. She felt like a fighter who had just won—and almost lost—the hardest physical combat of her life. She glanced at her torn sleeves, her soiled skirt and dusty shoes. Only the knife at her belt had come through the combat shining.

"You told me that if I ever wanted to see you I might come back."

"Do you think it is me you need talk to with so much as your own conscience?"

Muriel trembled at the thought. "My conscience? What would it tell me

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

now?"

The purplish-white skull that had led her back to the cave—undoubtedly the same skull that had come to her many days ago during the Moss festival—now began to speak again.

"I say to you—" it's words were drawn out in a singing resonance, soft, yet accusing voice, " that you must beware of knives."

"What does this mean?" Muriel turned to the old man in alarm. "Is this my conscience?"

"Does it sound like your conscience—or the conscience of someone else?" the old man asked. "Hasn't it been with you all along? Haven't you heard it in your dreams?"

Again the purplish-white skull was hovering close to her, offering its whispers. Accusations, warnings, exhortations. *So this was her conscience!*

"You almost murderrrred." It drew out the awful word. "You might have murderrrred. If it hadn't been for me, you would have murrrdered."

"Oh. I don't want to be haunted by you," Muriel cried. "Don't talk to me."

"You'd rather hear the conscience of some of the others, perhaps?" the old man suggested.

A HOST of skulls burst out of their lava bubbles, and the cavern became a pandemonium of singing. Wails, harsh laughter, gutteral growls, and the high-voiced shrieking of unbelievably hideous consciences—all of these mixed their voices in a terrifying concert.

Once she distinguished the heavy thundering words that somehow reminded her of Ubolt's thumping footsteps. The voice was accusing someone of entering houses and stealing.

Once she heard the rasping of an ugly, spiteful voice. The long-jawed skull somehow reminded her of the pointed face of a bird—or of Noskin. But what this conscience might be accusing Noskin of was more than she could catch. Too many other weird sounds came in upon it.

Could this light, sweet-toned singing be the voice of Neeka's conscience? If so, did it mean that Neeka was still alive?

"Can you hear the conscience of Neeka's parents?" the little old man asked. "No, I'm afraid they're too faint. Against all these others, the voices of the dead are not easily distinguished. But if you can make them out you'll find them much like Neeka's—with an unusual sweetness. You see, they haven't worn themselves hoarse accusing their owners."

These voices eluded her, for now she was hearing the rasping feminine conscience that kept calling, "You are a liar, a cheat, a kidnaper, a murderer." Over and over again, in a tone that connoted jealousy, avarice, and uncontrolled ambition. "You are a liar . . . a murderer."

Muriel caught the implication of this conscience—unquestionably Irlinza's. It was trying to tell Irlinza what she was becoming. It was trying to swerve her from her course of action.

"Does Irlinza hear these words?" she asked.

The little old man shook his head sadly. "Most people don't listen to their consciences. Irlinza? My dear, her conscience has been shrieking at her for years without the least bit of effect."

A ray of hope came to Muriel out of all this bedlam. "These voices—they tell so much," she was pleading. "Can't they be used to tell the people that I am not too terribly guilty?"

The little old man looked at her sympathetically. But his words were not words of hope. "The Dobberines have their beliefs and traditions. I am a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dobberine. I have never used my knowledge to destroy any tribal ceremonies."

CHAPTER X

The Evil Heart Ceremony

THE storms were thrashing on the surface of the planet. Messengers came down the trails every few hours to report the weather to the palace. The people hurried to store their last gatherings of moss in their clay homes. Honey-glue was being prepared in the valley homes to be used on the wedge-shaped doors as protection against the rush of water.

The hour for the Ceremony was twice pushed ahead, owing to new reports of conditions overhead. Then, several hours ahead of the scheduled time, the palace bells rang, and the people gathered in from far and near.

The Evil Heart Ceremony! What a time of excitement this occasion always was; but never more than this year. For the swift rumors of evil deeds had rung like shrill bells all through the Dobberine world.

Moss-gatherers from the hinterlands came down to the plaza, gawking and staring, wondering which of the beautiful faces of the many lovely girls might be that of the ill-fated beauty queen. Some of them, the parents of beloved children, were incensed to a fighting rage over what they had heard.

"She waited until she'd got to be beauty queen," they would say, "and then she took full advantage of the little child. Killed her, most likely. Anyway, got her out of the way somehow. That's the way, when folks get mad for jewels and riches. They lose their judgment. It's a clear case."

The bells rang almost constantly for an hour, and by that time the plaza crowd had swelled to thousands. Many hundreds would continue to stray into the city from remote places as the Ceremony proceeded. Muriel, walking along the outskirts of the crowd, kept watching the trails for the appearance of Jaff.

But it was quite uncertain whether Jaff would arrive for the ceremony. If the danger of the flood was too imminent, he would wait until all the other messengers had come in; for he was the swiftest runner and would eventually make the announcement that would send all these people scurrying to their water-proof homes.

But might Jaff not come back for the Ceremony before his last official message? No, Muriel was hoping for the impossible. In fact, it was her lingering hope that he might have found Neeka that kept tantalizing her.

"We are gathered to nominate a candidate for sacrifice," the Dobberking shouted through the huge metal horn. The crowd quieted and gathered in closer. "Any Dobberine has the privilege of making nominations."

The meeting moved swiftly. For once, these nominations took less than an hour. In times past they had been known to require as much as a day. For if there was no victim in sight whose evil deeds had struck through the hearts of many people, a great number of "spite" nominations could be expected.

At last Irlinza rose to make her nomination. She did not stop halfway up the the palace steps, as most of the speakers had done. She ascended to the porch and spoke through the metal megaphone usually reserved for the Dobberking himself.

Her speech was brief—so much so that it was over before Muriel had recovered from the shock of the hundreds of faces that turned to stare at her.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Is there any doubt," Irlinza concluded, "that we should choose for the sacrifice the one who has set this abominable example of social climbing—who has cast good judgment to the winds—who has forgotten every law of personal and property rights in her passion to get her hands on the riches of an innocent little girl? I nominate Muriel, the beauty queen."

THE words "beauty queen" were drawn out in a tone of high sarcasm that brought down a tremendous ovation. The cheering was a mass brutality, barely under organized control. It was the fever of a vast, unwieldly crowd, ready to descend with the full force of its latent sadism upon a single victim.

The throngs that surrounded Muriel turned to her and began to make way, as if she had already been chosen. She was almost bound to start walking forward, under public pressure.

Technically, the selection was not yet official. It was never official until the Dobberking made his announcement. Some whisperings within Muriel's hearing expressed this uncertainty. Would the Dobberking coincide in the public choice?

Now Noskin went through the officious routine of reading off the names and numbers of a number of laws that had been violated by the chief candidates for the sacrifice.

Meanwhile, Muriel looked again for Jaff. But Jaff did not come. It must be that the signs of the coming flood were too near for him to break away from his vital post somewhere overhead.

Each time that Muriel looked around she would see the little old Lava Man, sitting way back in one lonely corner, near the valley house of some friend who would probably give him shelter when the headwaters came.

"He's taking no interest in these proceedings," Muriel thought. "And he doesn't have a single skull in sight."

But she was remembering, in her courageous heart, the strongest advice that her own conscience had sung to her: that she must not fail the traditions. Whatever was expected of her as a Dobberine, *that she must do.*

Now Noskin whispered to the Dobberking. Absolute quiet reigned over the crowd.

The Dobberking nodded and rose to address the multitude.

"All evidence of evil deeds has pointed to one candidate. The sacrifice will be made by the beauty queen, Muriel. Muriel will come forward."

The crowd made way, and Muriel walked down to the front of the audience. When she came to the six-foot stalagmite—the point of the curved ridge of stone—she turned and faced the silent crowd.

"It is customary," the Dobberking called out, "for the beauty queen to officiate at this point of the ceremony. The victim must be tied to the stone pillar, and the beauty queen is supposed to tie the knot. However, in this case I must call upon the former queen of beauty—"

In a clear voice, Muriel interrupted this announcement with a statement that shocked every ear that could hear it.

"I am the queen of beauty. I have the right to tie myself to the post. I insist upon my right as a Dobberine —"

The rope, its ends saturated with honey-glue, was brought to Muriel. Swinging its ends deftly, she managed to make the strands catch. The honey-glue fastened with the strength of a knot. She had tied herself to the pillar.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAPTER XI

Sacrifice to the Flood

MANY Dobberines would long remember that picture. One of Muriel's forearms, not quite caught within the bonds of rope, was crossed over her breast. Her fingers clung to the winged ornament on her shoulder which Jaff had given her on another public occasion only a few short days ago.

But at once the picture became more complicated than anyone had anticipated. A purplish-white skull seemed to have formed out of the air. At least it looked like a skull to all who could see it hanging there. No one saw where it came from. It attracted a thousand whispered speculations, and before the officials were through consulting over its strange appearance, a second skull formed out of thin air to join it. Then a third.

The thousands of onlookers were almost unaware of the low rumbling sounds of the approaching flood. As a rule, the first echoes of thundering water from the caverns overhead would start the audience scurrying for shelters. But this sight of skulls was too tantalizing. There must be a meaning.

Ubolt paced back and forth impatiently, and Noskin, trying to exchange a word with him, was brushed aside. Irlinza came down the steps, followed by a number of the palace royalty, and they crowded around the lower end of the sentry ridge, demanding of each other that someone do something.

"I saw one of those before," Irlinza said, within Muriel's hearing. "The girl is bewitched. It's a good thing we're getting rid of her."

But now the crowd broke a path for the little old Lava Man. There were a few, among the audience of thousands, whose hopes were struck with fire at the sight of him; for in the years past, a few had heard tales of these mysteries or had even experienced, in secret, the revelations of these conscience voices of which the old man was obviously the guardian.

"Who is he?" Ubolt muttered.

"Let him talk," Irlinza said. "Find out what's at the bottom of all this."

So, before a wide-eyed audience, the Lava Man was allowed to speak. He was even provided with a megaphone. He pointed to the cluster of skulls—six of them were now floating in an eight foot orbit around Muriel's head—and he identified them to the audience as *consciences*.

"My life in the Lava Pit is more interesting than anyone can imagine," he said, "for I have the privilege of listening to the consciences of any of you. Can you hear the singing voices of these skulls? Listen to that beautiful soprano hum. That is the conscience of little Neeka."

Most of the crowd could not hear, but those who were close enough caught the sweetly spoken words. "Do something nice for Muriel. . . . Something nice for Muriel. . . . For Muriel. . ."

"And listen," said the Lava Man, "to the conscience of Noskin. It talks loud enough you'd think he could hear it, but he seldom does."

A HARSH voice called out wisps of accusations, dimmed by the uproar among the ranks of the palace crowd. "Is it right? . . . Is it right? . . . Is it right to take money . . . for lying about the evil deeds . . . of the people?"

The Dobberking was marching down the palace steps, now. He had been left out of this show, and he probably intended stopping it before his conscience was revealed. But halfway down, he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turned back. He caught sight of one very important messenger coming down the trail on a dead run. From somewhere overhead the rush of floods was echoing. The crowds began to break away.

"Wait!" the Lava Man cried. "You must hear the conscience of Ubolt, and the Dobberking, and above all, Irlinza."

Ubolt's gutteral conscience could be heard by the ears that were tuned to the approaching flood roar. "Ubolt, you live by making trouble. . . . Trouble, Ubolt. . . . Gossip. . . . Lies. . . . Intrigues. . . . Are you going to help Irlinza with a murder?"

Then Irlinza's shrill, distraught wail came from another skull, clamoring above the uproar of the crowd. "Listen to me, Irlinza. I am your conscience. . . . You haven't murdered her yet. . . Release her! . . . Release her before it is too late!"

At that, Muriel broke her terrified silence. She cried out to the palace crowd, and her accusing eyes shot at Irlinza like arrows. "That's your conscience, Irlinza. Listen to it. It's telling you not to murder Neeka—"

Her words were swallowed up in the tumult. This was unheard of, unprecedented. How did a person, bound to the stake for a sacrifice, dare to make accusations at her accused.

"It's a trick!" Irlinza screamed, white with rage. "All these skulls are cheap magic. But they won't win you your freedom. You're tied. The flood —"

The flood was coming. The last messenger, Jaff, raced down to the plaza, and bounded up the palace steps. At the sight of him, hundreds of persons had already begun to run for shelter. Now the Dobberking shouted his final announcement, bells began to ring, the whole plaza became one wide outspreading of people.

Jaff came down to Muriel, so breathless that he couldn't say a word. But he saw that she was clutching the winged ornament.

"Good-bye, Jaff." Her lips formed the words.

His heart was pounding too hard for him to accept any such resignation. He flew at the ropes, tried to tear them to shreds.

"Get him away from there," Ubolt shouted. Three guards whirled to the task. Jaff was struck down. He bounded up. They were on him with knives, then, and he was forced back to the farther side of the plaza. Some messenger friend tried to reason with him. It would not do to break up the sacrifice to the Flood Gods. He must control himself, even as Muriel herself had done so admirably.

THE first headwaters rushed through a channel on the Onyx City level. They were less than a mile away. A flood-tide coming down fast, pounding, thrashing, dashing into every nook and crevice that wasn't sealed.

The plaza had cleared. All across the slope the inhabitants of the Dobberine kingdom watched through their glass windows.

In the sentry house three figures huddled close, tense with the excitement of the oncoming flood. Ubolt and Irlinza were laughing. The Dobberking, having chosen this station rather than the palace, was not in a good humor. The recent voices of the skulls had struck deep. He would have plenty of music to face, from their revelations, after this flood was over. Even if he could prove that there was nothing to their words, that it was a cheap magic trick to try to save Muriel—

They opened the sentry house door to admit a fourth party—Noskin. He had changed his mind the last minute,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and as they closed the door after him, the water struck against it with a terrific thud. But the sentry house was a rock to stand against any force—

Except the force of shrill vibrations emitted by singing skulls.

For within the view of the thousands of Dobberines, safe in their sealed homes, fully ten skulls had gathered around the post of sacrifice. From the movement of their jaws, one could imagine that they were singing at the tops of their voices.

Muriel, the only person left against the rising flood, heard their weird song above the pounding of waters.

Their vibrations rang against the stone, and abruptly a huge chunk of it broke away.

It fell with a rip and a roar and an echo through the hollow lower end of the question-mark ridge of stone.

The effect was two-fold. It sent the sacrifice post reeling down toward the water. It opened the lower end of the natural tunnel that formed a part of the sentry house.

Muriel caught a quick glimpse of the sentry house window—the upper bulge of the question mark. Those four faces at the window saw her falling. They saw her ropes slip loose. *But they did not see that the lower end of their own shelter had broken open.*

Therefore they did not see that the little prisoner hidden within that end of the ridge, was revealed, not only to the eyes of Neeka but also to thousands of Dobberines.

One house nearby dared to open its sealed door at that moment. Jaff came bounding out, splashing knee-deep in the first rush of waters.

"Come on, Muriel!" he cried.

Muriel looked for the skulls. All but one had now disappeared and that one was fading. But it called to her, in the familiar voice of her own conscience. "Run, Muriel. The Flood Gods have spoken!"

Already Jaff had gathered the frightened little Neeka into his arms.

In the moment the three of them were safely behind the sealed door of the nearby house. It was their turn to look out at the wall of water that now came plunging down to engulf the whole valley.

"It's rushing into the Sentry House by the back door," Jaff said.

Little Neeka was hugging Muriel for all she was worth. "I knew you'd come all the time," she said. "One of the skulls from that funny old man's cave kept whispering to me that sometime you'd find me."

Muriel was weeping with joy.

But now the spectacle of the flood threatened to block their view. They knew that a few days of outer darkness would have to close over them before they could carry lights out into the open cavern again.

The last thing they saw, before the waters dashed over the window, was the boiling rush of the flood, striking its deadly blow at the sentry house, hurling its occupants out into roaring sea.

"Some thousands of people saw that happen," said Muriel. "I wonder what they'll think."

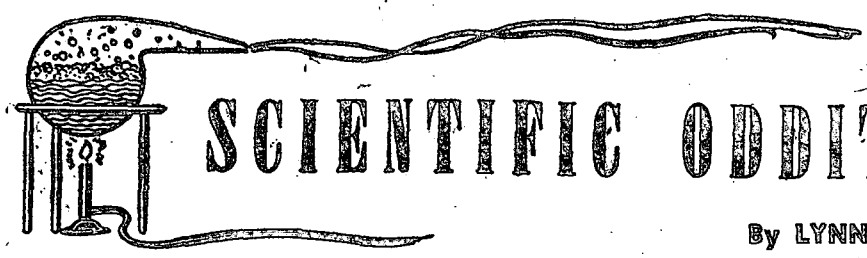
"I'll bet they wonder if we can miss the sacrifice for three or four years, to make up for those four people," said Neeka innocently.

"One of those four was the Dobber-king," said Jaff. "I've a hunch we'll do without the sacrifice for a long time to come."

THE END

★ BUY WAR BONDS ★

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



SCIENTIFIC ODDITIES

By LYNN STANDISH

IN ANCIENT times the damaging psychological effects of aerial warfare came startlingly to the attention of the world. The Chinese were the first to make use of the air in war. Their kites served as a means of communication between the fighting units. Their varied bright colors served as identification. The Romans also used kites on the battlefield as a type of insignia.

But in 1241 the Mongols brought psychological warfare into play. Their kites were constructed in the form of dragons. To add to their realistic appearance, a lighted torch was placed where the mouth was supposed to be. The bodies of the "dragons" appeared to float because the hot air streaming back from the torches buoyed up their tails. On the battlefield of Liegnitz the Mongol hordes appeared on horseback. In the eyes of the Germans they seemed to be accompanied by a flying swarm of breathing "dragons."

This apparition filled the Germans with fear; many of them threw down their arms and took flight. Danger from the skies has always produced a more damaging effect on the enemy's morale than danger approaching from his own level. The tremendous air forces now in use have been created, in part, to achieve that purpose.

WE CAN be very glad that blackout restrictions have been lifted in many cities, but the danger from bombings will not be over until the war is won. We never know when blackout restrictions will be put back into practice or will be imposed on more cities. To provide for this eventuality the army engineers at Fort Belvoir, Va., have developed and tested a new blackout bulb in cooperation with the Nela Park Engineering Department of the General Electric Company of Cleveland.

The bulb is given a thick black coat except for one spot of orange, the size of a nickel on its bottom. It can operate on the regular house current and will give enough light to enable people to see each other, doors, or furniture within a room. The bulb does away with the bother and expense of providing each room with blackout curtains since the usual curtains or drapes will prevent the light from being visible to attacking planes.

A small town in New Jersey had each of its homes equipped with these bulbs. When army pilots flew over the town they reported that they could not see even one ray of light even though the shades and curtains were not drawn.

In case of a bombing attack, the bulb could be used to light all the rooms of a home so that the occupants could move about without injuring themselves. If necessary, one room could be equipped with blackout curtains and be lit up in the usual manner to enable the occupants to read, play cards, or carry on any activities till the all clear sounds.

These bulbs are very inexpensive and will really come in handy if the need should ever arise.

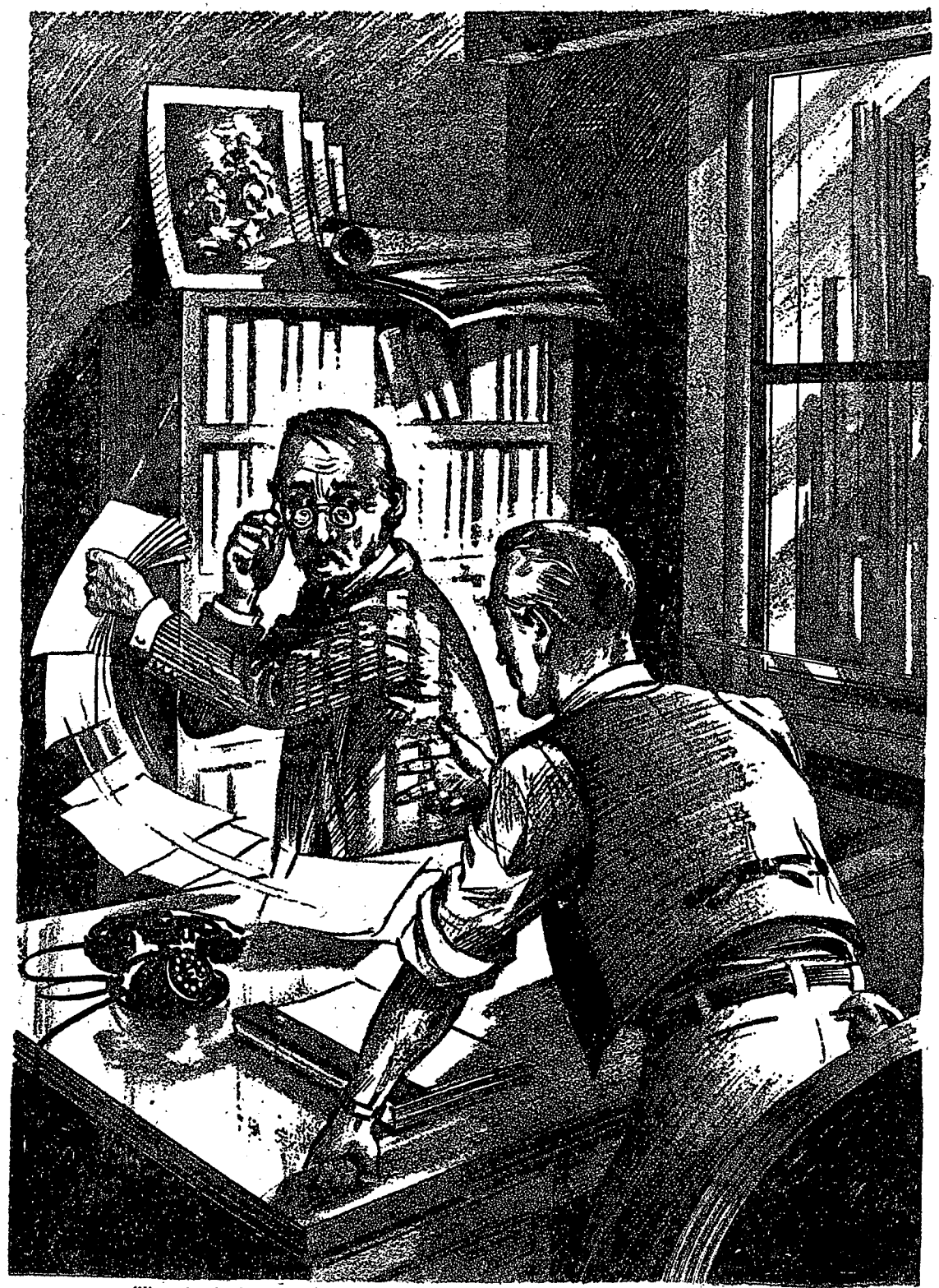
THERE is another world to be viewed beneath the rolling sea. It is a world of weird fantasy and mysterious grandeur. In those dark depths live gigantic creatures comparable to the huge prehistoric mammals which roamed the surface of the earth millions of years ago. The slimy floor of the ocean holds untold mineral and oil wealth. Upon the temperatures and currents of the sea depend largely the climates in which mankind lives and to a considerable extent the food which nourishes him. Finally, the ocean may hold the key to such profound riddles as the birth of our Earth, the origin of human life, and the future of our globe and its inhabitants.

Although men have sailed the sea for many centuries, have accurately charted the coasts of all civilized countries, and have mapped the various currents and "drifts," the sum of all this knowledge is only a drop in the bucket.

Dr. William Beebe, in man's most daring attempt to unravel some of the ocean's many mysteries, descended to a depth of about a half a mile in a specially constructed steel ball, the greatest depth to which any living person has descended. There are hollowed areas to be found there easily capable of swallowing Mt. Everest. So vast is this submarine world that there is an unknown area in the North Pacific twice as large as the United States which has been crossed by only a single line of soundings spaced about 250 miles apart. We agree with Dr. Austin H. Clark of the Smithsonian Institute when he says that "our oceans are almost unknown."

IS THERE a limit to the explorable universe? or do the galaxies, the groupings of suns and planets much like our own, extend on and on into the impenetrable depths of space. Already astronomers are measuring celestial bodies a billion trillion miles away, so far away that light must travel a million centuries to reach the earth.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"I'm afraid it's impossible," he said. "I just can't revise the manuscript."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE

By LEROY YERXA

MR. FLITT had a story he'd written . . . "Illogical? Oh no! You're wrong about that, Mr. Editor!"

SAMUEL S. BLACK stopped reading the script through which he had been proceeding at leisurely pace, and reached for the phone.

"Yes! What is it?"

Tillie Compton, the switchboard girl for Black-Publications, Incorporated answered in what was meant to be a fresh young voice:

"A Mr. Flitt to see you, Mr. Black."

This was all very formal on Tillie's part, because usually she called Samuel S. Black by his nickname, "Pinky" and even sat on his knee if the occasion seemed to demand it.

"Flitt—Flitt? Do we know anyone named Flitt?"

He heard Tillie sigh. Samuel S. Black's memory was dulled at times by the reams of "slush" he was forced to wade through to locate a presentable story for *Horrible Tales.*

Tillie's voice was gentle but flavored with a tinge of sarcasm.

"You have encouraged Mr. Flitt to submit material to our magazine."

Samuel Black knew that Mr. Flitt must be listening to Tillie's end of the conversation because Tillie carefully referred to the book by its full title and continued to use her best guest manners. Though still unable to remember Mr. Flitt, Black back-watered hastily.

"Oh yes, yes of course. Send Mr. Flitt in at once."

He discarded the phone as though it were a distasteful thing. He sat back, felt the sun on his back and it reminded him that the small office was very warm. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead with a hairy arm.

"Now who in blazes is Flitt?" he asked himself and searched his mind for an answer.

Suddenly he had it. Roscoe Flitt was the full name; and as Samuel Black remembered, his neck turned the color of baby pink and he swore softly. He had first met Mr. Flitt on the Ridge bus. That gentleman had been engaged in reading *Horrible Tales* through incredibly thick-lensed spectacles. The specs plus the fact that he had found someone reading his magazine had fascinated Mr. Black. Although the circulation department showed fifty thousand copies of *Horrible Tales* on the "sold" side of the records, this was the first time a reader had been caught in the act, as it were, of actually devouring

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the contents.

A conversation had been born, with a very unfortunate result for Mr. Black; Mr. Flitt felt that he had a message for the readers of Samuel S. Black's splendid little magazine.

A relationship had thereafter grown between them which Samuel Black tried at every opportunity to discourage. He had sent ten of Mr. Flitt's efforts back to him neatly enveloped and marked, "Not for Us!" Now Mr. Flitt was trying again. This time he had come in person.

THE sound of footsteps came from outside the door and a nervous hand was placed upon the doorknob. Before his guest could enter, Mr. Black shouted a hurried: "Come in."

This authorized an entrance which was going to take place anyway, and Black felt better for having stamped his approval on the act.

Mr. Flitt came in. He was a small gentleman with sloppy gray hat and a gray suit that had been cleansed partially of many contacts with soup and eggs. Mr. Flitt had a very thin face and an adam's-apple that seemed to do about as it pleased. He walked to the desk and tendered his manuscript, wrapped as usual in brown paper from the corner butcher shop. He also offered his hand. It was a frail, very white hand, and Samuel Black dropped it as soon as he could do so without appearing finicky.

"I've—I've tried again," Mr. Flitt said in a voice worn threadbare by long use. "I think this—might be nearer what you want."

It was evident that he expected an immediate examination of the atrocity wrapped in butcher's paper, for he sat down primly on the edge of the visitor's chair, removed his hat and started to play with the creases in it. Mr. Black spoke a few words on the subject of how glad he was to see Mr. Flitt and asked if he had mastered the task of putting "living breathing characters" into his fiction.

Mr. Flitt thought he had. Yes, in fact he was sure that he had done so. This left nothing for Mr. Black to do but unwrap the script, to study it hurriedly, make sure it had sentences and that it was written in the accepted English language. It met these simple requirements, so Mr. Black started to read.

For perhaps three minutes Mr. Black continued to scan the story, working from page one through seven. There the pink bloom of his neck darkened a shade, and he stopped reading. This was far enough. He had made an effort. He had a right to stop when he wished. Who did Flitt think he was? He couldn't force . . .

"I hope it suits your needs," Mr. Flitt said, evidently having read a writer's magazine to find the correct method of approaching the editor.

Mr. Black sighed. He looked very sorry. He was, but not for Mr. Flitt.

"I'm disappointed," he said gently. "The characters aren't realistic or plausible."

Mr. Flitt seemed distressed. However, he said nothing and this left Samuel S. Black on the spot. He sat back, replaced the pages in their proper order and took a long breath.

"I take it that this is a story about a man who finds that by pressing a certain nerve behind his right ear, he can disappear entirely from sight; and materializes once more by repeating the process."

Mr. Flitt nodded gravely.

"You have captured the mood of the thing entirely," he admitted. "I worked very hard to produce something your readers would appreciate."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MR. BLACK sat in silent contemplation for some time. He stared out the window across town toward the cool blue sweep of Lake Michigan. He dreamed of a boat that would take him far away from people like Mr. Flitt. He dreamed so vividly that when he came once more to his senses it gave him quite a start to see that Mr. Flitt was still present.

He had nothing to say, but *had* to say *something*. He would use the old line again. It would do no good, but it would get rid of Mr. Flitt and at this moment, that was most desirable.

"I must repeat," he said sternly, "that your stories must contain characters in whom one can believe. New ideas—new situations. The idea of becoming invisible is very old. It has been published a thousand times. Not even the method is new. In fact, I seem to recall a comic strip based upon the same idea."

Mr. Flitt nodded eagerly.

"I realize that," he said, "but I worked very hard to tell a story about people like the ones who live next door. People who eat, sleep and act as you and I. For that reason, when the disappearance of my hero occurs, so suddenly, it creates a shock that will surely carry through to a convincing climax."

Mr. Flitt knew all the rules. He knew them because Samuel Black had repeated them for him a hundred times. Mr. Flitt was a splendid student, so far as learning words was concerned. Samuel Black scratched his nose again and wondered what he could say. Mr. Flitt just didn't know enough to leave impossible situations alone.

"I can believe every character in the story with the exception of your hero, Mr. Frozzy," he admitted. "Mr. Frozzy is a dilapidated, unconventional person from the first. He goes around getting himself into trouble until it seems impossible for him to escape death. Then, by pressing this—this nerve behind his ear, he escapes and solves everything. I tell you, Mr. Flitt, it's not the way to write a story."

Mr. Flitt arose slowly, turning his hat in his hands and clearing his throat as little men do when they feel like crying and don't dare to because they weren't brought up that way.

"Then I'm to understand that you don't wish to purchase my effort?"

Samuel Black nodded ever so slightly never taking his eyes from Mr. Flitt's narrow, disappointed little face.

"Unless you take out that antiquated business of pressing the nerve, and give your character Mr. Frozzy a more logical manner of reaching his end, I'm afraid I can't accept the story."

Mr. Flitt seemed to go into conference with himself. He made queer noises in his throat. He placed his hat upon his head, removed it with nervous fingers and placed it on his head again. Color mounted to his cheeks and changed them from dead gray to a mild tone of brown. Then he seemingly reached a decision.

"I can't change Mr. Frozzy's habits," he said firmly. "Mr. Frozzy acts as any one would under the circumstances. He'll have to remain as he is."

This gave Samuel Black the opportunity he had been praying for.

"Then," he said, and passed the script to Mr. Flitt, "I'm afraid I have no choice. I can't buy the story."

There was no mistaking the look of genuine disgust that flashed into Mr. Flitt's pale eyes.

"Very well," he snapped, and snatched the script with both hands.

He backed a few steps away from the desk, pressed a bony finger into a spot behind the lobe of his right ear, and vanished.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You are destined to be Earth's true supermen," the angel said

HIROHITO sat in the small hut atop the mountain and waited. In a way, he could not bring himself to regret, completely, what had happened. Armadas of American B-29s had laid waste to Tokyo, Yokohama and the cities to the north and south. A great seaborne army then caught Japan's shores unprotected, as they had never been prepared for such an invasion. The war-lords had fled, but most of them were caught and treated none too gently by the Americans. Smoke still drifted up from the valleys and the groans of dying Japanese soldiers still echoed in Hirohito's ears.

Yet he wasn't entirely dissatisfied, the Son of Heaven told himself.

The reason for that frame of mind was clear to him. For he had named himself, now, the Immortal One of the Future.

After a while the Americans would go away. The women and children and a few of the old men would be left. Then Hirohito, self-chosen to the task, would build again—build for another war.

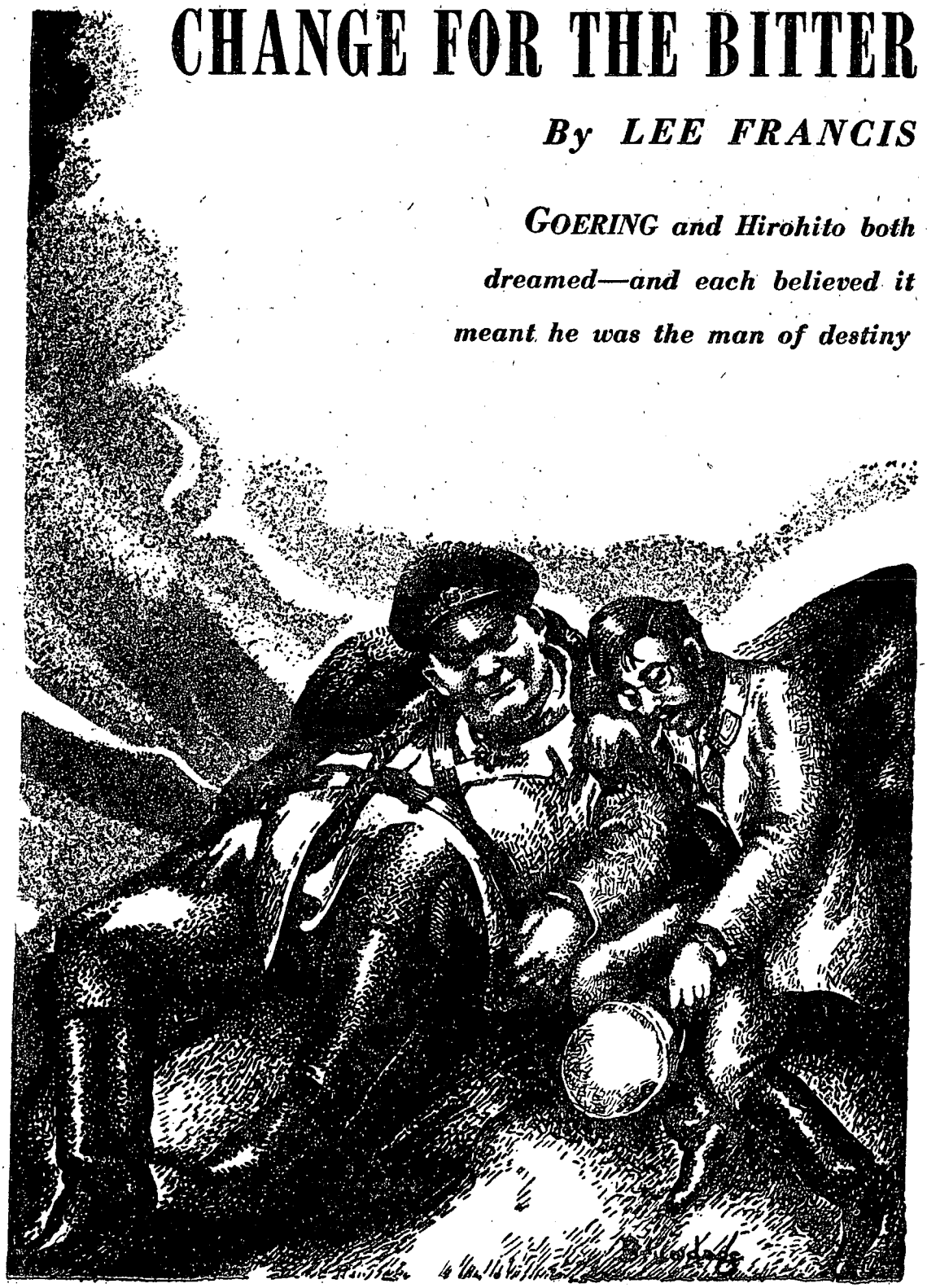
He caught sight of the gross figure of his companion, struggling up the steep trail toward the hut, and his lips pressed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHANGE FOR THE BITTER

By LEE FRANCIS

GOERING and Hirohito both dreamed—and each believed it meant he was the man of destiny



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

together a little more tightly.

Hermann Goering, the only German leader to escape when the Reich had fallen, had sought refuge with Japan's former emperor atop the silent mountain. And both were sure of what lay ahead, for both had received similar messages in their dreams.

Naturally neither had confided in the other.

The Voice had spoken to Goering in his dreams. "You are destined to be Earth's true superman," it informed him. "But first you must slay the one called Hirohito. He dreams of having all power. Your future plans depend on his death."

Next, the Voice spoke to Hirohito while he slept. "The yellow race will rise again," it whispered. "Hitler is dead by his own hand. You must kill the pig Goering if your plans are to be successful."

THUS the days passed on the slopes of the great mountain. Each of the two men knew that destiny looked upon him as a favorite son. Each waited for a favorable opportunity to kill the other.

Today, Hirohito was standing at the door as Goering entered. The German dropped wearily down on the couch. He was careful to keep his hand close to the gun in his belt.

"How are things in the valley, today, Hermann?" asked the Japanese.

Goering sat up with some difficulty and looked warily at his companion.

"Very bad," he admitted. "I was forced to hide in a muddy ditch to evade an American patrol."

Hirohito thought of what the Voice had told him. He said: "Oh, yes; I have been meaning to ask you what your plans are once it is safe for you to leave this place."

Goering, too, was thinking of his own message from the Voice.

He said: "I shall find a boat to take me back to Germany. There I shall make plans for another war . . . one that my country will win."

Hirohito's fingers stroked the hilt of the ceremonial dagger at his waist. "We are both old men and the world believes we are harmless. We alone escaped the wrath of the Allied Nations. They do not suspect that we have a purpose to fulfill."

Goering's hand closed on the butt of his gun. He said: "Someday the world will again feel our feet on its neck!"

THE NIGHT was still and dark. Hermann Goering stood just outside the hut's door, staring at the red glow in the sky that marked what was left of Yokohama. No sound drifted up from the valley. Wind swept against the mountain's summit.

Hirohito had gone to the spring for water.

Goering removed his gun from its holster, examined the chambers carefully, then turned and walked silently down the trail.

HIROHITO was tired. He dipped the wooden bucket into the clear waters of the spring and lifted it out again, setting it on the ground near his feet. Then, with a sharp decisive nod of his head, he pulled the heavy dagger from his belt and ran his thumb gently along the razor-like edge.

"A single plunge of this into the fat one's belly," he mused, "and my first problem is solved."

He moved stealthily up the trail.

THEY met in the darkness of the narrow trail. Neither had given his foe credit for being prepared; each was sure of his quarry. But Hirohito was the quicker of the two.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hermann Goering uttered one startled grunt and toppled to the ground, the ceremonial dagger buried to its hilt in his sagging paunch. With most of his remaining strength, he managed to pull out the blade free of his own flesh.

He caught a glimpse of a polished boot as Hirohito turned to flee. With every ounce of energy left in him, Goering lifted his revolver and fired. His aim, even in the darkness, was perfect; the gaunt Japanese sank to his knees, blood spurting from the back of his neck. Goering fired again, and Hirohito fell face forward into the dust of the trail. A last convulsive shudder shook his gross frame, then he moved no more.

Goering tried to sit up. A red stain poured from between his lips and he fell back and was dead.

But Hirohito and Goering would have their reward. They would live again, the Voice had promised, as supermen.

GOERING opened his eyes slowly and a grin of triumph spread across his broad face.

He was not dead after all!

He felt quickly for the deep wound in his belly. It was not there. He was whole and well and very happy. He knew now what the Voice had meant. He could not die. In truth, he was a real superman.

He stared about him, startled by the change that had taken place on the world.

The trail was gone. The mountain had disappeared. He was sitting in the depths of a strange, vine-clad jungle. The vines were close together and deep-rooted in coppery, pitted soil.

He rose to his feet. His body reacted sluggishly, as though a great change had taken place within it. Yes, the world was certainly different, but he could not complain about that. Perhaps the Voice had seen fit to send him to rule a strange unsettled planet. He tried his feet and, although the earth beneath them trembled at times and winds blew strong in the black forest, he managed fairly well.

In the days that followed, Goering was to experience a great loneliness and, with it, a new power. It seemed that he was alone on this world. He, Goering the superman, was at last king of his own realm.

Storms came and often floods swept over him. Still, the waters that forced him to cling desperately to the vines about him did not discourage the German. For was he not a superman?

HAD HE known that Hirohito was also alive and close by, Goering would not have been so content. Hirohito had the same satisfaction, as of Paradise found. He had gradually grown to love the strange land on which he had been placed. He experienced the same adventures that befell Goering. He learned that by digging into the coppery earth, he could find a strange red fluid which gave strength to his body. He, too, clung to the vines when the floods came, and felt cleansed after they had passed. The sun warmed his body and he grew fat and complacent.

Earthquakes shook his world but he ignored them, holding firm to the vast pitted land that was his to rule as he saw fit.

IT WAS inevitable that the two would meet again. This happened early one morning after Hermann Goering had been forced to cling to a sturdy vine and wait for a very bad storm to pass. The flooding waters almost drowned him. When at last the rain subsided, he dried himself and moved around for a while, beginning to wonder if he was going to enjoy living alone in this strange world.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then he saw Hirohito. Hirohito, in going through the processes of death and rebirth, had changed a great deal. Goering, too, was different; but each recognized the other at once.

Hate and lust for murder swept over Goering. He saw now that one or the other of them must rule this land, that he must kill or be killed.

They circled about with great care, then Goering plunged forward suddenly, depending on his greater weight to overthrow Hirohito. To his surprise, the Jap turned and fled with blind haste. With a roar of triumph Goering set out in pursuit. He felt new strength surging through him at this evidence that Hirohito did not dare to fight him.

They ran swiftly, both taking advantage of the rough terrain, and at last Goering saw that they were leaving the forest and coming out onto a wide plain which was free of vegetation. Now he could overtake the Japanese. He puffed mightily, trying to shorten the distance between them.

Suddenly Goering came to a halt and stared, wide-eyed, at what lay ahead.

And then a strange thing happened. Hirohito reached a series of high mounds rising from the level plain. On the summit of one of these mounds, a slim round tower lifted its crest into the air. Sunlight glinted from the surface of the tower. And Hirohito was running toward that tower.

He reached the base and started to climb, like a small boy scuttling up the trunk of a tree. Goering watched in fascination as Hirohito neared the top of the tower.

The Japanese reached the incredibly sharp tip . . . then flung himself, face down, upon it. The point pierced his body easily, protruding from his back. Then he lay very still, his legs and arms hanging on either side of the tower.

Hirohito had been a coward. He had committed hara-kiri!

GOERING had never before ventured from the forest. Therefore he could not dream of the terrible fate that awaited him on the wide plain. As he stood there, smiling grimly at the thought of Hirohito's death, a red glow appeared in the misty sky. He strained his weak eyes to watch it. The smile left his face. He dropped to the ground and sought to burrow into it. It was useless.

The glow grew larger as it came closer. Goering felt the heat of it—the heat of a strange, falling sun.

A scream of fear broke from his lips. The fire scorched his blubbery body. He screamed again as the breath-taking agony of the fire bathed him from head to foot. Still screaming, he rolled over, just as the full heat of the glow crushed against him.

Hermann Goering's rule of the strange world was ended.

PRIVATE BEAM watched Corporal Wanger, Beam's buddy during the assault on Tokyo, remove the glowing end of the cigarette from a smooth spot on his bare midriff.

"Funniest thing I ever saw," Wanger said, his blue eyes twinkling. "Two cooties come out of the hair on my chest. One of them commits suicide on the point of this needle and I get the other one with my cigarette before he could get back into the hair."

Beam snorted. "Once lost in *that* jungle of hair and he'd have been safe, all right. Hurry up with that button, will you?"

Bill Wanger removed the dead cootie from the tip of the needle and resumed his task of sewing a button on Beam's shirt. He was still smiling.

"Funny thing about cooties," he mused. "I don't know how they can

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

look at one another, being so ugly."

Beam grinned.

"I guess a cootie doesn't realize he looks different from anyone else," he said.

THE END

Vignettes OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Bernouilli

He was the father of the kinetic theory of gases, also of the science of hydro dynamics in theory.

DANIEL BERNOUILLI, younger brother of a famous Swiss family of scientists and mathematicians, was born in 1700, in Groningen, Germany. He was educated at home under private teachers. His family was noted for mathematical ability in several generations. Following his natural inclinations he specialized in that science and in medicine, and attained a high rank as an instructor and investigator in anatomy, physics and botany. He was successfully a professor in one or more of those sciences and in experimental and speculative philosophy in the Universities of St. Petersburg, Groningen and Basle.

His most important work is his "Hydrodynamica" published in 1745. In it he developed for the first time the kinetic theory of gases, which is regarded as his great contribution to the advance of knowledge. The equilibrium, the pressure, the reaction and varied velocities of fluids are considered both theoretically and practically. One of these problems deals with an ingenious mode of propelling vessels by the reaction of water ejected from the stern.

Bernouilli gained or shared no less than ten prizes of the Academy of Sciences of Paris. The first, for a memoir on the construction of a clepsydra for measuring time exactly at sea, he gained at the age of 24; the second, for one on the physical cause of the inclination of the planetary orbits, he divided with his father; and the third, for a communication on the tides, he shared with Euler, Colin Maclaurin and another competitor. The problem of vibrating cords, which had been some time before resolved by Brook Taylor and d'Alembert, became the subject of a discussion between Bernouilli and his friend Euler. In one of his early investigations he gave a demonstration of the problem of the parallelogram of forces. His work in later life was chiefly directed to the doctrine of probabilities in reference to practical purposes, and in particular to economic subjects. He died in 1782.

As the comparatively modern science of organic chemistry is based upon a correct knowledge of the properties of gases, it will be clear how important was the foundation laid by Bernouilli. Unless the vacuum be regarded as material, the gaseous is the simplest form of matter. In it the molecules are most widely separated, and consequently their influnce upon each other must be at a minimum. This means that the number of causes determining the properties of a gas must be fewer and much less complex than those in a liquid or solid, where the forces of mutual attraction are more powerful.

Boyle, Dalton, Gay-Lussac, Avogadro and others discovered the laws which express the action of gases as a class when by themselves. It was the part of Bernouilli to first give expression in mathematical language to the principles underlying these; that is, the principles that govern the molecule of matter in its motions—as in gases and liquids—and which produce such phenomena as diffusion, osmosis, evaporation, dissociation, energy conduction, fluid pressure, viscosity, etc. From his analysis of the forces in action among them it has become possible to calculate the approximate number of molecules in any given volume at atmospheric pressure, their mean distance apart, the mean free path of each and the actual proportion of space occupied by them, which was found to be about one-four-thousandths part of the volume in which they were supposed to be confined. From this, of course, the actual molecular volume itself could be readily deduced.

Much of Bernouilli's work was published

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By RICHARD CASEY

SIEGFRIED and the Dragon is a legend of heroism and justice—and thus it didn't quite fit modern Germans!

A SMALL group of officers were standing in the vast hall. They were attired in their finest dress uniforms, for this was a rare event. They had just finished a special banquet presided over by Field Marshal Hermann Goering.

All of them were a bit nervous. They awaited Goering's presence in the great room below the winding stairs. Later there would be dancing. Before that, however, something was to happen. Something they had not been told about, but they knew it was important from the very way Goering waited to make his entrance.

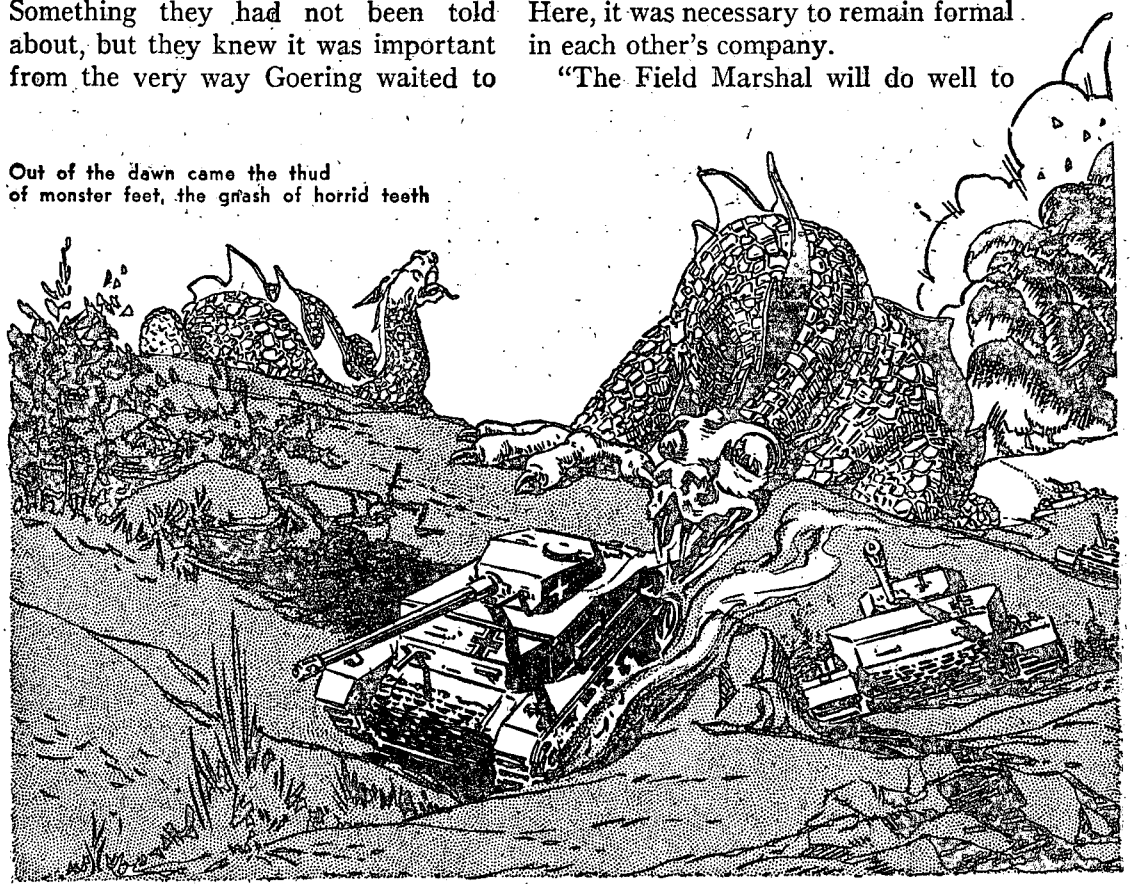
Lieutenant Karl Miller spoke in a low voice to his companion, Captain Richter.

"I think it may be another medal," he said. "The Field Marshal has not delivered a speech or given medals for a long time. And the departure for Italy is scheduled tomorrow."

Captain Richter nodded gravely. He was a young man, as was Miller. In the field, they were good companions. Here, it was necessary to remain formal in each other's company.

"The Field Marshal will do well to

Out of the dawn came the thud of monster feet, the gnash of horrid teeth



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

read more of the history of Germany before delivering speeches. He has a charming way of garbling an event until it backfires and causes the people to laugh at him."

His voice dropped to a whisper and died completely as his eyes caught the stout figure that came slowly down the wide stairs.

Hermann Goering had donned his most gaudy uniform. Medals covered the jacket until it showed signs of breaking away from his massive body. A smile appeared on his lips as he reached the bottom of the stairs, took two steps out into the room and halted.

"Your attention."

The officers arranged themselves before him in a neat line.

"Heil Hitler," Goering snapped.

Their arms went up in salute.

"Heil Hitler."

Goering relaxed. He fished a small package from his pocket and untied the blue ribbon around it. As he did so, he started talking.

"You will be in the field in two weeks," he said. The message was delivered as though it was a great secret. The details were already familiar to these men. They watched the package in his hand. "Last week I was honored by decorating members of the Condor Legion of the Luftwaffe with a medal designed by our great Fuehrer."

He hesitated and silence settled over the hall. One officer cleared his throat, trying to hide the sound behind his open palm. Goering glanced at him suspiciously, the smile fading for a moment. Then he resumed his speech.

"I have designed a medal also."

He waited for the important words to sink in.

A few men applauded politely and Goering's smile widened to full capacity.

"You officers will have the honor of destroying a great force of American troops who plan to establish a beachhead near Rome."

IT WASN'T news to them. Details of the planned invasion had been on the dispatch board for weeks. Every phase of the defense was planned. Troops had been moving out for a month to cover that section of the Italian coast.

"In Germany," the Field Marshal announced in a lofty voice, "there have been many heroes. Down through the ages, Germans have been fighting men. Our folk-tales are glorious records of a past that we must fight for."

He had the wrapping off his package now and opened a small brown box.

"I have caused a medal to be prepared for each of you officers who will stop the American attempt to reach Rome. Once, according to our great legends, there was a vast hoard of gold hidden under the Rhine. The man who reaches that gold and who makes a ring of it would, with the power of that ring, have the strength to rule the world and make weaker men flee before him.

"Our heroic figure of the past is Siegmund, who slew the dragon. Siegmund, who was all powerful, played a vital part in the legend of the Rhine gold."

He removed the first medal from the box and stepped toward Captain Richter.

"I pin on Captain Richter's coat this golden symbol of Siegmund's sword and dragon. May it carry him to a great victory over the barbarian allies and establish Rome as a stronghold for the German army."

He moved down the line of men slowly, pinning each medal in its place, taking the hand of each man in his own great paw.

When he had finished, he snapped to attention once more.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And now there will be dancing in the ballroom."

His arm snapped aloft.

"Heil Hitler."

They answered him mechanically, some of them admiring the new medal, others wondering just how easily they could preserve Rome for the army of occupation that would be ready to take over in a few weeks.

Slim, chestnut-haired Captain Richter did not smile at the thought of dancing in the ballroom. He was struggling in his mind to recall the legend of Siegmund. It was true, he thought. No medal could better represent courage and honor than the golden dragon and sword.

CAPTAIN RICHTER held his wrist watch close to his face and tried to check the time. It was dark, and fog covered the Italian countryside. The Anzio beaches were completely hidden from sight three miles to the west. Richter smiled softly. Ten after midnight.

This would be one of the biggest triumphs for the German army, since that first swift march across the little countries. For once, the allies were going to walk into the perfect trap. A trap that German Intelligence had planned weeks ago. The army had carried it out to the last detail.

In his trench, three miles back of the beaches, Captain Richter was looking forward to mass slaughter. His right hand itched to use the automatic in his belt.

The Americans were scheduled to land in force. The number of boats was known. The time of landing and the number of men who would storm the beach had been ascertained by a flawless system of spies.

The country for five miles behind the beaches was bristling with guns. Machine guns and trench mortars were so thick behind the wire barrier that stretched down the beach, that men were in each other's way when they manned them. Rocket projectiles would cover the beach. The Luftwaffe would get none of the honor. The German Air Forces were busy to the south and in Russia. Their very absence would erase any suspicions the Americans might have.

Yes, Richter thought, it was all very well planned. He touched the gold dragon and sword medal on his chest. Goering was right. Germany itself was a sign of great strength. Germany had nothing to worry about. He turned and walked down the long steps into a well-lighted dugout. Lieutenant Karl Miller was seated behind a desk, making a last minute check-up on the work that was expected of his men.

Richter leaned quietly over his shoulder.

"It is after twelve," he said. "In another two hours we shall know how well we are prepared."

The lieutenant looked up. He had been a schoolboy when the war started. Now he was a murderer. The medals on his chest proved just how well he could kill. He remembered a ragged line of troublesome civilians that had gone down under the fire of his machine gun in Poland. His platoon had taken care of three hundred of them in less than ten minutes.

"I am to go to the beach in a few minutes," he said. "You should envy me, Captain. I will be in a position to see the enemy go down on his knees and cry for mercy. You are unfortunate to be placed in the rear."

Richter smiled.

"The overall plan is important to me," he said softly. "I do not care to see them dying. The fact that they are destroyed will satisfy me."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Miller made an impatient gesture with his hand.

"But to sit behind a gun in a pill box," he said. "To watch the sand spurt up around their knees as they run straight into the barbwire. It will come so fast that they will be in a panic. Then the tanks will land. The trap is ready?"

Richter nodded.

"But of course," he said. "A wide trap and a very deep one has been dug along the entire section bordering the beach. When the tanks drop in, fire throwers have been placed where they can destroy the crews within seconds."

Miller leaned back, slapped his knee with his gloves and arose. He sighed.

"Wonderful," he said. He shook hands with his companion. "I will leave when the slaughter is over. Shall we lunch together in Rome?"

Richter nodded. His eyes glistened with excitement.

"I have arranged a short leave for us both," he said. "Lunch in Rome."

LIEUTENANT KARL MILLER was in an ugly mood. It had taken an hour and a half to drive half way to the beach. He had not anticipated the number of stops he must make to identify himself. He had not fully realized the extent of operations, even though they had been drilled into him for three months.

Often he had been forced to wait until troops and heavy tanks crossed the road. At the tank trap, a ramp was let down and he crossed. At last he was within sight of the beach.

The moon was hidden. It seemed as though even the darkness was in favor of the German army. The landing enemy would walk into those lines, completely blinded by the night.

The car crept forward in low gear. Voices spoke to him almost in a whisper and he answered the challenge curtly. He wanted to find his group.

The car stopped, wheels buried deep in dry ruts.

He spoke urgently to the driver.

"Hurry! We have but half an hour."

The driver turned half around in his seat. Then something—a terrible unseen force, wrenched him free of his seat and hurled him into the darkness. An oath whipped from Miller's lips. He started to stand up. What had gone wrong?

Before he could escape, a huge, shadowy thing struck at him. A gasp of horror escaped his open mouth.

Lieutenant Miller stared straight into the red, fiery eyes of a huge dragon. He was aware of an open, slavering mouth and long, fang-like teeth. Then a blast of fire hit his face.

Miller released one long horrified scream and clutched at his burned face. He fell forward over the seat, his lungs seared by the flame, his body lifeless and inert.

THERE are many versions of what happened that dark morning, just a few miles south of Rome. Of course, authorities would hardly release the story as Captain Richter told it. The captain was crazed and half-dead himself, and could not be relied upon to remember exactly how events took place. Yet, in spite of the hush that followed the defeat of the German army, some great force must have been at work.

Bits of the story came through. It was impossible to keep men from talking. Men who had seen death like nothing they ever imagined. Death that allowed no escape and gave no quarter.

Lieutenant Miller's glimpse of a fire-breathing dragon naturally was not recorded. But others saw the same thing,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and they talked. Mostly they babbled their stories in some prison camp, after the American landing.

The tank trap had been dug deep, they said. It was but thirty minutes before the "V" hour. The German army was ready for the attack.

Men who were to use the fire throwers to destroy tank crews saw mysterious shapes moving in the depths of the long tank trap. Before they could escape, a horde of dragons moved up the side of the trap and overcame them. They fought back as best a man can fight when he recognizes death close at hand. The dragons were very real, the survivers assured news-men. They had long, snake-like bodies covered with green and red scales. Batlike wings added to the terror and when the tongues of fire failed to erase all life, huge claws dug deep into the flesh of men and left them lying in mounds of bloody, crushed flesh.

In fifteen minutes, the entire German army was routed. Captain Richter, three miles away from the beach, laughed when the reports came to him. He laughed no longer as the entire army started to move back.

They came faster, rushing past his post without their weapons. They were so frightened that they dared not stop even to explain what had happened. At last, standing by his dugout, the captain had to admit the truth. Those who escaped were in headlong flight. Then he saw the hills covered with hulking, slithering bodies of green- and red-scaled dragons. He could not run. It was too late. A great fright shook his body and he dived underground like a rat, waiting to be dug out.

SATURDAY—two o'clock—the "V" hour for the landing of American forces on the Anzio beaches. The first barge hit the sand. At first a few men went into the water creeping forward under cover of darkness, seeking a place where they could cut through the wire.

The rest is history. There is no point to be gained by repeating how easily that beachhead was established. A few snipers hid in the towns, firing half-heartedly at the invading Americans. A few men were blown up by mines along the beach.

As for the Germany army? It simply did not exist. Americans who landed at Anzio that dark morning thanked God that they didn't run into another Tarawa. Their job was tough, but it turned out to be a picnic by comparison.

The Anzio beaches, a Brooklyn boy said, reminded him of Coney Island on Christmas morning. It was completely deserted.

A unit of machine gunners sat around their gun, waiting for a possible chance to score on Hitler.

"Them Goimens," Brooklyn said, "sure got a surprise dis time." But that wasn't quite true. Some insist that the dragon story was hatched up secretly by Goebbels and it is agreed that it wouldn't be beyond the little club foot to dream up such a yarn. Still, a lot of the boys talked with prisoners when they reached Rome.

There was, in particular, a crazed idiot who saluted them stiffly in prison camp and introduced himself as Captain Richter. Richter wasn't in very good shape. He had been dragged out of a dugout behind the beaches. They took his medals for souvenirs, but allowed him to keep one, a golden circle with a dragon and sword inscribed upon its surface. They let him keep it because he cried like a baby when they tried to take it away.

"This is a symbol of the power of Germany." He cried and laughed at

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the same time. "Perhaps you gentlemen didn't know about our Field Marshal's gift to change history for his own purpose."

It didn't make sense to the boys who talked with him, but they humored him anyhow.

"Goering is a wonderful historian," Richter said, and after each sentence they had to wait while a fit of laughter shook his weak body. "I should have known what would happen. For a long time I didn't understand."

There wasn't anyone in the crowd of American soldiers who wasn't interested. A kid from Maryland stepped forward and shook the captain's shoulders.

"Talk sense," he said.

Richter sobered. He shook his head sadly from side to side.

"No," he said. "Goering gave us the medal of the sword and dragon and said they would give us the power to conquer you. He read the legend of the Rhine Gold. It is true about the gold. It did give great power."

He paused, and tears ran down his cheeks.

"Goering is like that. He read that the gold gave power to conquer the weak, but he put the symbol of the sword and dragon on the medals. Goering forgot that his hero, Siegmund, wasn't trying to conquer the world. Siegmund killed a dragon while fighting for justice, not for power. Goering has made a great mistake this time. If someone will tell him just how bad his mistake is, he'll be more careful about reading legends in the future. He expected Siegmund; instead the dragons came!"

The Maryland boy shook his head and turned away.

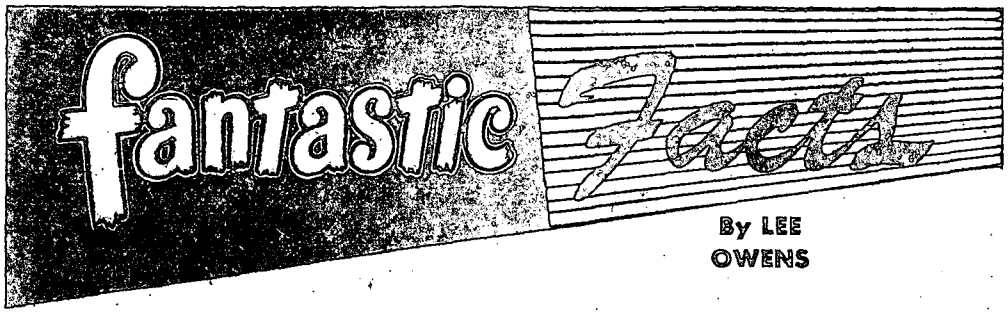
"Dragons," he said in a little wistful voice. "That's like a German. If he can't lick a man fairly, he blames it on something like dragons. My God, what an imagination."

When the party left the prison camp, Captain Richter stood alone by the gate watching them go. With his fingers, he played with the gold medal that dangled from his chest.

"Our Goering should not try to out do Hitler," he said softly. "He is only mad enough to be a fool, while Hitler is completely mad and therefore a genius."

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Fantastic Adventures, published quarterly at Chicago, Illinois, for Oct. 1, 1944. State of Illinois, County of Cook, ss. Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared A. T. Pullen, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the business manager of Fantistic Adventures and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Wm. B. Ziff, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; Editor, B. G. Davis, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; Managing Editor, Raymond Palmer, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; Business Manager, A. T. Pullen, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill. 2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Ziff-Davis Pub. Co., 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; W. B. Ziff Co., 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; Wm. B. Ziff, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; B. G. Davis, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; A. Ziff, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; S. Davis, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is ..... (This information is required from daily publications only.) Arthur T. Pullen, Business Manager. Signature of business manager.)
Sworn to and subscribed before me this 26th day of September, 1944.
(Seal.) Wm. F. Hennessey, Notary Pulbic. (My commission expires June 30, 1948.)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



By LEE OWENS

A PRINTED invitation to travel to the planet Jupiter or Mercury might reasonably be returned to the sender marked, "Sorry, perhaps another day." Not that humans should act disagreeably toward their fellow planets, but it is imperative that we remember that: on Jupiter man would at once be frozen, asphyxiated, and poisoned, as well as doubly pressed to death by his own weight and by an atmospheric pressure of about a million terrestrial atmospheres. On Mercury, faring a little better, he would be burned to death by the sun's heat, killed by its ultraviolet radiation, asphyxiated from lack of oxygen, and desiccated from lack of water.

IN THE world of outer space huge immeasurable forces are continually at work. Some day Emerson's famous dictum, "hitch your wagon to a star," will come true if we learn to utilize the solar energy to turn the wheels, not only of our wagons, but of all the numerous Machine Age devices. Scientists are feverishly attempting to find a way to make use of the heat of the sun. In this way they hope to be able to offset the approaching shortage of fuel, as is noted in our fast dwindling coal supply.

EVER on the search for a new device that will give our boys an edge on the Axis, the Western Electric Company has developed in their Bell Telephone Laboratories a microphone that enables our pilots to communicate with one another or with the ground crew without using their hands to hold a mike. The device consists of two microphones that are held snugly against the pilot's adam's apple by a strap. It operates by picking up the vibrations made by the pilot's vocal cords as he speaks and has the advantage of preventing all motor and gun noises from drowning out the message. Many pilots now flying over Europe and Asia and Africa have this handy device to thank for their life.

CAN life in any form maintain a foothold in the frigid pools of air miles above the earth's surface? Scientists have found ever-increasing evidence which leads them to believe that countless species of insects struggle for existence in the air miles above this earth. How high this struggle for life goes into the airy spaces, we do not know. Entomologists, in searching for the answer, have equipped airplanes with insect traps. Specimens were collected several thousand feet up. Bacterial life, too, is believed to exist in upper air strata.

What chance would a bacterium have in the higher air currents which are said to attain a velocity of 100 to 200 miles an hour? The faintest vertical puff of wind would hurl it up to regions where food is limited and space is limitless. How long could it exist in altitudes from 50,000 to 75,000 feet? How high is the roof to all our spheres of life?

These are only a few of the questions which are spinning through the minds of our scientists of today.

ANYONE or anything that hinders our war effort must be wiped out or else put away where they can no longer do any harm.

In Florida a small species of flies—called dog flies by the natives—were seriously hampering the training of army fliers. These flies look just like the common house fly, but nature has given them exceedingly sharp mouthparts that makes their bite very annoying.

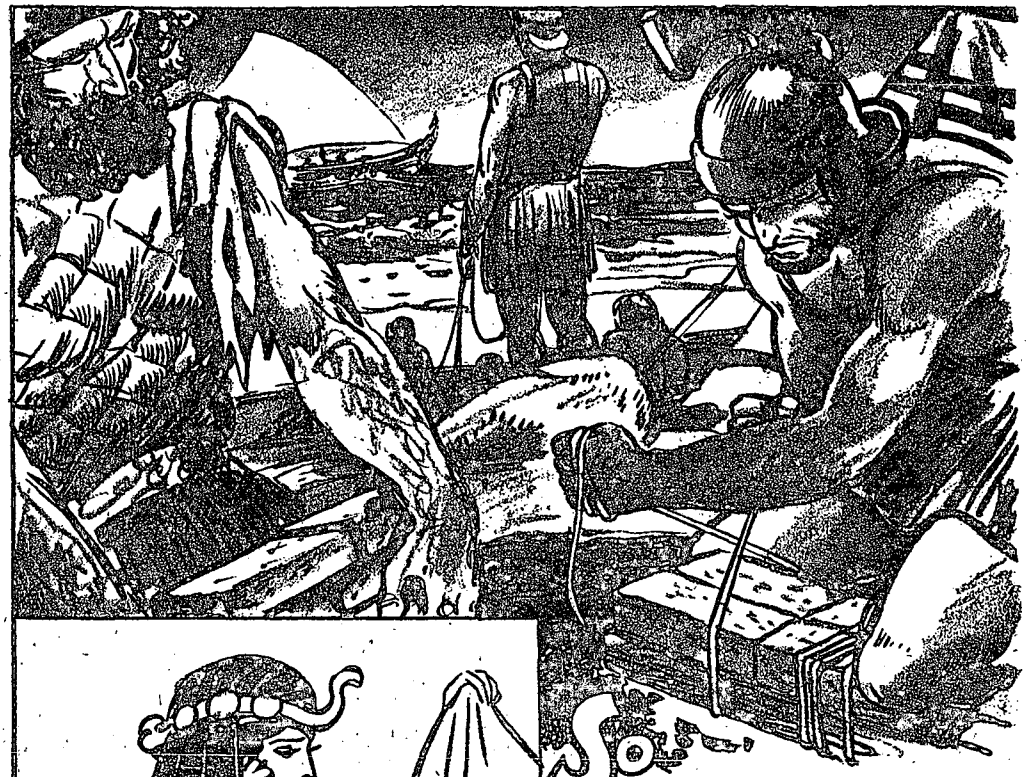
The U. S. Department of Agriculture and the U. S. Public Health Service joined forces to combat this menace. The job was supervised by Dr. W. E. Dave of the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine working out of Panama City, Florida. The first step was to find the pests' breeding place which was discovered to be piles of rotting sea vegetation washed up on the shores of bayous and backwaters going inland from the sandbars of the coast.

The cheapest method of destroying larvae and eggs was found to be creosote oil mixed with Diesel light fuel oil. Traveling in barges, which were able to move in the shallow waters, laborers covered the vegetation with the oil by using power sprayers. Only one application was necessary to destroy the eggs and the dog flies didn't return to lay new eggs.

Not only the embryo fliers but also the residents of the region benefited by this campaign. For years they had been plagued by the flies which attacked humans and cattle alike, but nothing was done about it until the flies hampered our war effort—this time the flies had bitten off more than they could chew.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROMANCE of the ELEMENTS



SCARCE WAS SILVER IN EGYPT ABOUT 1500 B.C., THAT IT ACTUALLY OUTVALUED GOLD! THREE CENTURIES LATER, PHOENICIAN VOYAGERS FOUND SO MUCH IN SPAIN THAT THEY USED SILVER IN PLACE OF LEAD TO WEIGHT THEIR WOODEN ANCHORS.

ONE ANCIENT CARTHAGENIAN EXTRACTION PROCESS WAS TO RINSE THE ORE FIVE TIMES, SIEVE IT, FUSE IT WITH LEAD, THEN CUPELLA FOR PURE SILVER. EARLY EGYPTIANS, IT IS SAID, USED A SILVER SOLUTION TO MARK THEIR LINEN.

ABU-R-RAIHAN, TENTH-CENTURY ARABIAN SCIENTIST, CAME MIGHTY CLOSE TO THE TRUTH WHEN HE ASSIGNED 10.35 TO SILVER AS THE SPECIFIC GRAVITY.

A CIRCLE — ANCIENT EGYPTIAN SYMBOL FOR GOD, PERFECTION, AND THE SUN — REPRESENTED GOLD. SILVER, NEXT MOST VALUABLE, WAS ASSIGNED A SEMI-CIRCLE WHICH STOOD FOR DIANA AND THE MOON. ALCHEMISTS USED THESE SYMBOLS FAR INTO MEDIAEVAL TIMES.

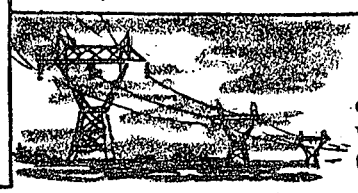
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SILVER—by ROD RUTH & GORDON McLEAN

ABOUT THE TIME OF THE SPANISH CONQUEST, SILVER FISH WITH MOVABLE SCALES WERE BEING SOLD AS TOYS IN MEXICAN MARKETS. THE HELMETS AND BREASTPLATES OF MONTEZUMA'S WARRIORS WERE ADORNED WITH THE METAL.

THE HALOGEN SALTS OF SILVER WERE EARLY USED IN PHOTOGRAPHY BECAUSE OF THEIR REACTION TO THE ACTION OF LIGHT. CERTAIN SILVER COMPOUNDS RANK HIGH AS DISINFECTANTS. AS MUCH AS 7 POUNDS OF SILVER HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM THE STOMACHS OF MULES WORKING IN MEXICAN MINES.

BIGGEST SILVER USE? FOR MONEY, OF COURSE. ABOUT 3/4 OF IT FINDS USE THIS WAY. IT ALL STARTED ABOUT 869 B.C., WHEN KING PHIDON OF EGRIA STRUCK THE FIRST COIN.



ELECTRICAL CONDUCTOR PAR EXCELLENCE IS SILVER, WHICH OUTSCORES COPPER FOUR TO THREE.

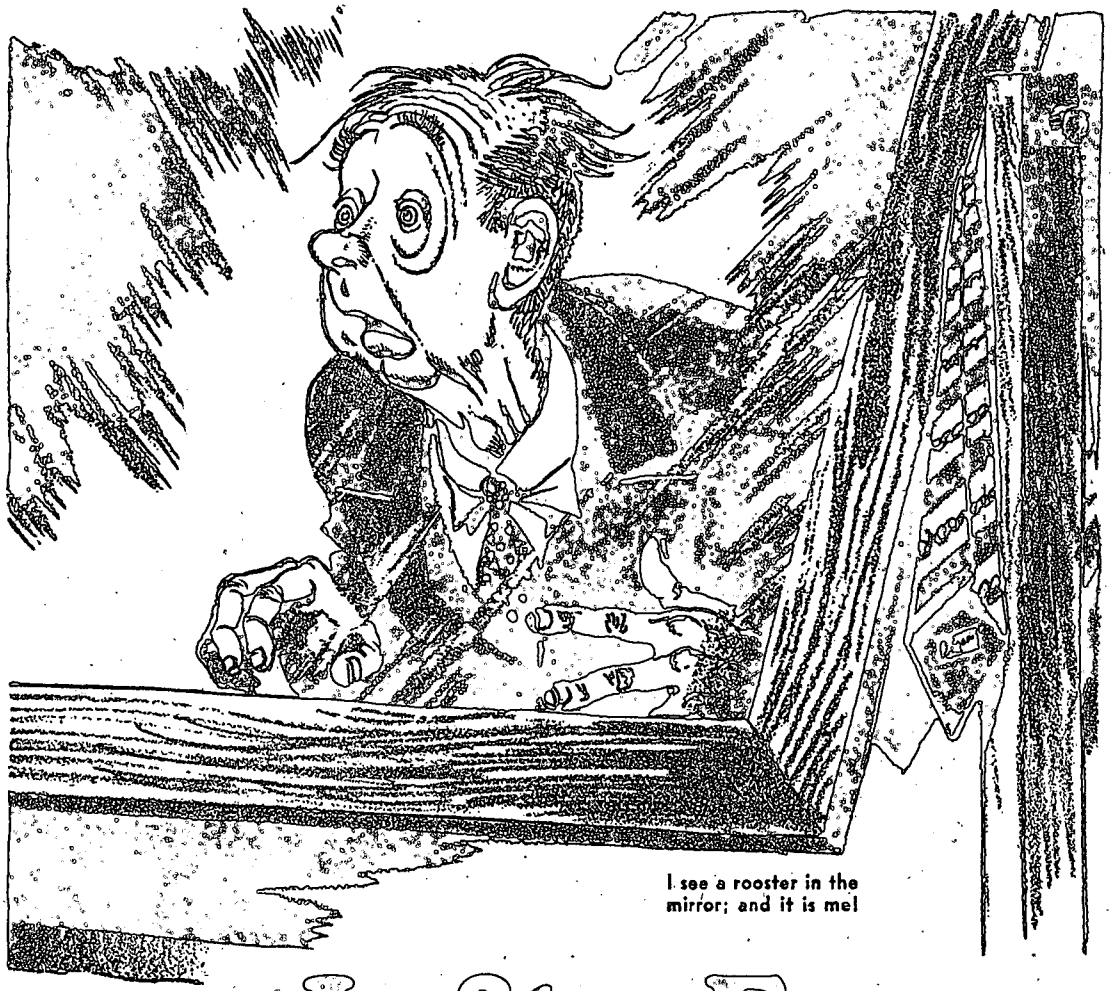
SILVER is number 47 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Ag, and its atomic weight is 107.880. Its specific gravity varies from 9.87 to 10.55. Its specific heat is 0.56. Its melting point is 960.5°; its boiling point is about 2,000° C. It is the whitest of all metals, has a perfect metallic lustre. It is the most malleable and ductile of all metals except gold. It is by far the best conductor of electricity and heat.

(NEXT ISSUE—The Romance of Thallium)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LEFTY got himself lit on Rooster Booster, and woke up with a splitting chicken headache—and identity!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



I see a rooster in the mirror; and it is me!

Lefty Feep Gets Henpecked

By ROBERT BLOCH

"QUIT pickin' at that chicken!" Lefty Feep's voice rattled the crockery in the restaurant. The tall, thin man stood glaring at me, and I looked up in astonishment. His voice was almost as loud as his clothes.

"Do not pull anything with that pullet!" said Mr. Feep, snatching a chicken-leg from my plate and hiding it under a napkin.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Sit down and explain yourself. Why are you objecting to my chicken dinner?"

Feep sighed and sat down at the table next to me.

"The sight of fowl makes me howl,"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he muttered. "After the experience I have, even a pheasant is unpleasant, and a sparrow chills my marrow. But a hen is worse again!"

"You don't like chickens, eh, Lefty?"

Mr. Feep began to tremble violently.

"Please do not even mention the name of same," he implored. "Don't I ever tell you about the time somebody gives me the bird?"

I began to feel uneasy. "Now don't tell me it reminds you of another story," I snapped.

"How do you guess?" beamed Lefty Feep. "Did you ever hear the one about the traveling salesman and the farmer's daughter?"

"Now listen, Lefty—"

"No. You listen to me. It is not the kind of a story you are thinking of. Because the traveling salesman happens to be me, and the farmer's daughter is —but wait, I'll give you the lowdown."

"Not now," I said, getting up hastily. "I've got to duck off."

"Ducks!" moaned Lefty Feep. "There you go again! More poultry! Just for that, I insist on telling you the fowl story."

"I'll bet that's just what it is," I mumbled.

But Lefty Feep didn't hear me. He had already opened his mouth and started to tell his tale. . . .

I AM walking down the street the other day, reading a time-table and trying to find out if I can make reservations on the next freight-train out of town.

You see, I really need a little vacation right now, and if I do not arrange to take it myself, then my creditors will arrange a vacation for me—probably at Alcatraz.

To be frank but rank, I am stuck over money—I cannot haul it from my wallet. Right now I am down at the heels, and the sheriff is on them.

So I scan the fable in this time-table and move my feet down the street.

Suddenly, a hand reaches out and yanks me by the shoulder.

"Oh, oh!" I think. "The sheriff catches up to me!" I am all set to yammer and stammer when I turn around and see that it is not the sheriff who puts his fingerprints on my clavicle.

"Why, it's Lefty Feep!" pipes a voice.

I find myself inspecting the spectacles of Sylvester Skeetch.

"What happens to you?" I gasp.

Little Sylvester Skeetch stares up at me with a broad grin.

"Nothing happens," he shrugs.

"Oh yes it does," I insist. "You suffer a severe amputation, don't you?"

"What do you mean?" Skeetch asks.

"Why—you are practically cut in half," I reply. "That is, I never see you alone before. You are always with your partner, Mordecai Meetch!"

This is an exact fact. Sylvester Skeetch and Mordecai Meetch go together always, and they are never farther apart than twenty beers are from a hangover. Skeetch and Meetch are inventors, and very terrific with things scientific. In the past I always find them working their Laboratories, which they call the HORSECRACKER INSTITUTE.

So now I am astonished to see little inventor Skeetch walking down the street without his partner.

"What gives?" I inquire.

"Oh, I just leave Meetch back at the laboratories, working on a patriotic assignment."

"Patriotic?"

"With all this meat rationing," says Skeetch, "we decide to perfect an elixir that will stimulate growth and fecundity in poultry. Something that will in-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crease the size and habits of chickens. then we will sell it to chicken-raisers and help provide more poultry and eggs."

"Good idea," I remark. "Are you successful?"

"Absolutely," says Sylvester Skeetch. "That is why I leave just now. I am going down to the newspaper office now and insert an advertisement, offering our elixir for sale.

"Listen to this," Skeetch commands. He hauls out a piece of paper and recites his ad.

"WHY BE A DUMB CLUCK? DON'T SCRATCH FOR DOUGH WHEN YOU CAN MAKE BIG MONEY RAISING CHICKENS!

"Why does a chicken cross the road? To get to a chicken farm operating in this new, revolutionary way. Do you want to rule the roost? Then send for a sample bottle of this new elixir—WOOSTER'S ROOSTER BOOSTER."

I LISTEN with growing suspicion. "Who is this guy Wooster?" I ask.

"Oh that's just a trade name we think up," Skeetch explains.

"What does this elixir do for chickens?" I persist. "The ad doesn't tell."

"Very simple," says the inventor. "The elixir is a glandular extract which has an effect on the hormones of the *gallus* species, modifying the endocrinological functions so that increased metabolic rate is resultant in excessive growth of fowl and—"

"You don't say!" I exclaim. "In other words, chickens get bigger and better. So why don't you say so in the ad?"

Skeetch's face falls, but he picks it up from his collar. "Don't you think this ad is any good?" he sighs.

"I will not say it is no good," I console him. "I merely say that it is lousy. No, you cannot explain all this in an ad. Besides, city people read this, and you want to reach farmers."

"But how can we?" wails Skeetch. "We can't talk to the farmers. We can't leave town and—"

I get a mental commotion that results in a notion.

"Hey! I say. "Why not forget this ad and send me out on the road to peddle this elixir of yours? I can sell it to farmers direct. I will do the vocals to a bunch of local yokels."

"You mean, you'll become a sort of traveling salesman?" Skeetch asks.

"Why not? I can hand out the guff to sell this stuff." I begin to boil him the old oil, figuring that this is a chance to get out of town and make a little of what ain't hay, at the same time.

In a few minutes, Skeetch begins to listen to my proposition. "Come on up and we'll talk to Meetch," he says.

So I go up to the HORSECRACKER INSTITUTE, where Meetch is toiling and boiling up a batch of this Rooster Booster.

It's hot in the pot, and I notice that the elixir is dark brown, odorless, and full of bubbles.

"This is the incubator bait you are going to peddle?" I inquire.

"Right," says Mordecai Meetch. Mordecai Meetch, by the way, looks just like Sylvester Skeetch, only more so.

I tell the man my plan, and in a little while he sees and agrees.

"By the way," I mention. "Can't you tell me a little more about this chicken-juice? Does it make the hens and roosters bigger? Does it mean they lay more eggs?"

"Eggzactly," says Skeetch. "According to our formulae it removes the inhibitory reflexes and causes exhydration to occur—"

"Never mind that," I snap. "What I mean is, do you try this out on any chicken to see if it makes it thicken

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or merely sicken?"

"Where would we get a chicken?" asks Meetch, shrugging. "No, strictly speaking, we never actually experiment. Or should I say, egg-speriment?"

"You should not."

"You can test it on the road," Meetch tells me. "Now what you must do is take our car and load it up with bottles of the elixir. I have labels made up and you can peddle the stuff at one dollar a bottle. When can you leave for your trip to the country.

"How about right now?" I come back.

And so it is arranged.

THAT night I am already wending my way over hill and dale, driving upstate at a great rate in a car filled with ample samples of Wooster's Rooster Booster.

It is my intention to peddle this invention up north and gradually work my way back downstate again. So I drive the car but far, and when it gets dark I do not park.

But along about seven a seven rolls out of heaven. I blunder into some thunder that makes me wonder. In half an hour begins a shower.

I see a light in a farmhouse off the road, and being a wandering boy, I wonder if it is for me. Perhaps I can dash helter-skelter for shelter.

So I drive into the yard, and climb out, wetting my brain in the rain. I buckle a knuckle against the door.

Then the door opens and I am staring at a ginch.

Now according to me, a pretty girl is my favorite form of femininity. And speaking of favorite forms, this ginch certainly has one. There is an air of beauty about this cutie; she has the right eyes and size, cute lips and hips, fair hair and a smile with style. Just the type of blonde of which I am fond.

So I stand there in the drizzle and smile at her.

"Pardon me," I say, "but it is raining outside."

She grins. "Is that so? Are you from the Weather Bureau?"

"No, honey," I answer, very courteous. "I am strictly speaking only from hunger. My name is Lefty Feep and I am a traveling salesman."

She giggles. "Well, that a coincidence! My name is Daisy Falfa and I'm a farmer's daughter."

"Good day, Daisy," I greet her. "Is there any chance of me coming in out of this storm or must I learn to swim here on your doorstep?"

"Come on in, by all means," says Daisy. So I enter the farmhouse.

"Who's this?" grunts a voice. The voice belongs to a tall, red-faced old whisker sitting at the kitchen table. He is obviously the farmer himself.

Daisy leads me up to him. "This is my father, Al Falfa," she tells me. Al Falfa sticks out a horny hand and I am stuck with it.

"We chicken farmers don't see many salesmen these days," Al Falfa tells me. "Sit down and have some supper, Mr. Feep. Daisy will fix you up a plate."

I brighten up when he mentions supper. Also I am happy to learn he is a chicken farmer. Sure enough, staring out of the window I notice the yard is full of hen pens and cackle cottages.

Maybe I can make a sale, to say nothing of a hit with Daisy. So I sit down and put on a nice smile, and Daisy puts on a nice hot supper, and we begin to chatter of this and that matter.

Everything is going swell, just as it always does in the stories about traveling salesmen. Daisy is looking at me over the cooking and Al Falfa is laughing at the gags I pull and then—

There is a score at the door.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Comes a knock that rattles the lock, and Daisy gets up and opens the door.

INTO the room comes a country boy wearing a city slicker. A big overgrown goat in a raincoat—he stands over six feet tall until he sits down. This towheaded lout wears a mean grin on his chin as he nods to Al Falfa and puts his arm around Daisy. She breaks loose but he doesn't seem to notice.

"Hiya, Pop!" he greets Al Falfa. "How's my future father-in-law?"

"Huh!" grunts Al Falfa. I can see this idea does not please him. As for Daisy, she sniffs. "I never say I'll marry you," she tells the bumpkin. "Don't count your chickens before they hatch."

"Ha, that's a good one!" laughs the bumpkin. "You should talk about hatching chickens! That's just the trouble, isn't it?—your chickens don't hatch. And they get stolen. So you have no money. So I hold the mortgage on the farm here. So you can't pay. So, I'm willing to call off foreclosure if you marry me, Daisy."

I wink and blink. I never believe such things actually happen—villains foreclosing mortgages unless farmers' daughters will marry them. Unless I get my directions mixed, this is EAST LYNNE.

"Uh—pardon me," says Al Falfa, interrupting the lout. "This is Mr. Lefty Feep, Luke. Mr. Feep, meet our neighbor Luke."

The bumpkin gets up and slaps me on the back, not quite hard enough to break it. "Yep, that's me," he says. "Luke the Duke they call me in these parts. On account of I'm such a snappy dresser. Look," he says, pulling his raincoat open. "I got zoot overalls!"

I nod politely—politely, that is, for a guy with a back-ache—and Luke the Duke laughs again. "Yep," he chuckles. "I'm the richest farmer in these parts. Got more acres of corn than anybody in the county."

"I believe you," I mutter. "I can tell the minute I see you just how corny you are."

Luke the Duke ignores this penetrating remark and leers at Daisy.

"Come on, gal," he says. "Let's you and me go set in the parlor." Daisy shakes her head.

"Well, how about a movie in town?" asks Luke the Duke. "You won't get caught in the rain. I got the hog truck outside. Real class, huh?"

Al Falfa tips his daughter a wink. She frowns but gives in. "All right, Luke," she sighs. "Let's go."

Daisy leaves to get her coat and purse.

Luke the Duke stares at Al Falfa. He is not smiling now. "How about it?" he grunts. "Have you got the money for the interest payments? Installment's due day after tomorrow."

"I'm sorry, Luke. If you can give me just a little more time—I'm gonna take some chickens in to town and—"

"Nothing doing," Luke snaps. "I want my dough. Unless of course, you can get Daisy to listen to reason and marry me."

"But—"

"She'd better make up her mind right quick," Luke tells him. "I got a nice wedding ring for her and she ought to be wearing it before it turns green."

"That's up to Daisy," says Al Falfa. "She's got a mind of her own. Maybe she'll marry you and maybe she won't."

"I'll ask her just once more, tonight," Luke the Duke answers. "Got no time to waste courting. Should be doing something useful, like butchering a shoat."

Daisy comes in and she and Luke the Duke leave for the show. Daisy doesn't look happy when she leaves me, and Al Falfa doesn't either. As for me, I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

am very down in the mouth.

AS IT turns out, this is a very appropriate place to be. For no sooner does the door close, than Al Falfa hauls out a big jug of liquor.

"Applejack," he tells me. "Have a drink?"

Well, I very seldom drink any more—any more than I can get. So we start to battle the bottle.

"This situation drives me to drink," Al Falfa confesses. "What am I going to do? I must either pay off to Luke the Duke or let him marry my daughter. And the chickens are like a bunch of absentee workers these days—laying off instead of laying. It's terrible."

Quite a mess, is my guess. Of course, this is the cue for me to come out and try to sell Al Falfa some of my product.

But he seems like a nice guy, and I do not have the heart to spring Wooster's Rooster Booster on him.

We take another drink.

"You want to know something?" demands Al Falfa. "To make matters worse, somebody is all the time stealing my chickens."

The applejack is getting him. I am getting the applejack.

"Yep," he sighs. "All the time stealing my chickens, somebody is. Every time I get a nice batch up to take to market, somebody robs my hencoops."

We take another drink on that. Al Falfa thinks about his lost chickens, and I think about that little chicken, Daisy.

"Honest," hiccups Al Falfa. "I can't help but feel that on this chicken farm a dastardly plot is hatching!"

On that we kill the bottle. And the bottle almost kills us. At least, I am very groggy. Groggy enough to remember that I also smuggle a pint along in the car.

"Next drink's on me," I announce, to cheer Al Falfa up. "Got it out in the car. I'll bring it in."

"But it's wet outside."

"I'm wet inside. Who cares? Just be a minute."

And I am. I flounder outside to the car, grope around in the dark, and find my bottle.

Coming back through the yard I start to shiver, so I pull out the cork and gargle a gurgle.

Then I walk in and park the pint on the table.

"Here it is," I tell Al Falfa. "Help yourself."

"Not that stuff!" growls the farmer.

"No? What's wrong with it?"

"Read the label," he tells me, waving his finger at the bottle.

I read the label and understand all. In the dark I grab the wrong bottle. What I bring in is a pint of Wooster's Rooster Booster!

"Whooie!" I mention, in a loud voice.

Because I just remember that when I am in the yard I drink a terrific swig of this elixir.

"What's the matter?" yells Al Falfa.

"Uggglllooofffff!" I explain. "Guffonkk!"

All at once I feel my stomach going round and round. And then my head. A reeling feeling that makes me hit the ceiling.

There is a queer sensation buzzing under my belt—and then I know I am done for. I think I am hitting the ceiling, but I really hit the floor.

I am out, but icy.

WHAT happens after that I can only guess. Al Falfa must carry me up to bed. A fine way for a traveling salesman to spend the night!

All night long I am moaning and groaning and turning and burning.

And when I come to and open my eyes, I see something I never expect

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to see in all my life.

Dawn.

Yes, I am staring out the window at the cold, gray light of dawn. That elixir must have a strange effect to wake me up at this unearthly hour. I open my mouth to yawn at dawn.

But I do not yawn.

My mouth opens and a sound comes out, but it is not a yawn. It is a *crow!*

"Cockadoodle-doo!" I hear myself state. "Cockadoodle-doo!"

I am startled. What in the world am I cockadoodle-doing? I hop out of bed and lurch over in front of a mirror.

I stare at my reflection. That is, I stare at the spot where my recollection should be—but ain't! I do not see myself reflecting in the mirror at all. Instead I gaze at the image of a big rooster.

Yes, a big rooster, three feet tall in his stocking claws! That is what I see—and it is me!

I open my mouth to utter an appropriate comment, but all that comes out is a cackle.

And in the mirror, the rooster opens its beak.

There it is. I drink Wooster's Rooster Booster and I am now a foul-looking fowl.

Either that, or it's all a hangover. Only I simply can't be hanging that far over. I look down at my body—at the feathers and wings. They say fine feathers make fine birds, but I feel far from being in fine feather.

Like it or not, I'm a rooster. What can I do?

The mere thought of being a chicken makes me sicken. I am madder than a wet hen.

I remember that Skeetch and Meetch never actually experiment with this stuff yet. All they know is that it makes chickens grow and lay eggs. But what it does to human beings—!

I start hopping around the room, clucking and waving my feathers. They are lovely black feathers, and I find I can even jump a few feet by using my wings. I stare again at the mirror—at my red comb and yellow beak, at my spurs and my swelling chest. I am certainly the biggest rooster I ever expect to see, but the idea does not please me. I don't want to win prizes at a Poultry Show. I am not a chicken-fancier, and I do not fancy being a chicken. It sticks in my craw.

I must do something about all this, but quick.

I hop around the room, hopping mad, when a tap comes on the door.

"Who is it?" I mean to say, but all that I can show is a crow.

THE tap turns into a knock and the knock turns into a bang, and then the door opens and I see Daisy standing there.

"Mr. Feep!" she calls. And then she sees me.

"Why, where is Mr. Feep?" she asks herself. "And what is this rooster doing in his room?"

She advances on me and there is a glitter in her gorgeous eyes that I do not like.

"Who lets you out of the coop?" she mutters. "Shoo! Get out!"

All at once she is coming after me with a broom-handle, and I hop down the hall, and she chases me downstairs and out into the yard.

I can't talk, and she does not understand my squawk, so I am helpless.

She stands there in the doorway and scratches her lovely head.

"What a big rooster," she says. "I never realize we have such a huge thing! Why, it's a freak! Maybe I ought to tell Dad—he'll take it in and sell it to a butcher."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For some reason this idea does not appeal to yours truly. I must make her understand who I am, somehow.

I stare at the gravel in the yard. Perhaps, if I cannot talk to her, I can write her a message. So I stretch out my claws and try to write in the gravel.

But as I travel through the gravel, I see that it is no use. I cannot write. I can only make hen-tracks.

Daisy doesn't even watch me. She is still puzzling her pretty head.

"Now what becomes of Mr. Feep?" she sighs. "He couldn't leave—his car is still outside. I do hope he's all right. Perhaps that big black ugly rooster annoys him in his room."

I stand there, but what can I do? Everything seems to be lost. I cannot hope to win Daisy's affection in my present state. She is not going to share a love-nest with a chicken.

I stare around the yard and spot the nearest hen-coop. It is surrounded by barbed wire, but the gate is open. I figure that if I am a rooster I might as well make the best of it and examine the new world in which I must live. Perhaps I will find something to help me.

So I head for the coop and pass the barbed wire. It gives me a little panicky feeling to do so—but after all, this is not the first time I am in the pen.

I wander around and hear a lot of clucking from inside the henhouse. I waddle up to the door and stick my head close to it. The clucking is quite loud.

And the funny part of it is—I can understand it!

Yes, it doesn't sound like barnyard clucking to me any more. I can understand chicken talk!

That at least cheers me up a little. I am not going to be all alone. So I march into the henhouse and stand there, clearing my throat and crowing a little.

A bunch of chickens are squatting in the straw against the wall. They stop clucking and stare at me.

"Who is that big black brute?" clucks an old biddy in the corner. "I don't remember seeing him before."

"Isn't he a monster?" sniffs a Plymouth Rock. "Must be a freak of some kind. It fairly gives me goose-flesh to look at him."

A SPECKLED hen whispers something under her wing and they all stare at me and cackle.

I feel highly embarrassed. Even these chickens look on me as an outsider. I am neither flesh nor fowl.

"Why doesn't he go away?" sniffs the Plymouth Rock, again. "I am not used to associating with such queer birds. Why, he looks like he is brought up in a barn."

They all laugh. I am ready to sink through the floor. My comb turns red as I blush.

"Imagine," the Plymouth Rock goes on. "Such an indignity! How can he stay in the same farmyard with me, whose ancestor comes over on the Mayflower and hatches the first egg a chicken ever lays in this country."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" snaps a little bantam rooster, strutting into the center of the group of hens. "Let's throw him out of here! We don't want any intruders. This is our barnyard and we got no use for strangers. Down with strangers, I say—down with strangers!"

He talks like a Communist, but this does not surprise me when I notice he is a Rhode Island Red.

"I'll fix the chicken-livered squab!" yaps another rooster. He is a big white puffed-up old bird, and his red eyes are angry as he stares at me in the doorway. "Watch me, girls."

He stalks past the hens and comes up

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to me.

"Out of this hen-house, stranger," he clucks.

I get mad. "Aw, cut the cackle," I tell him. "This isn't a hen-party."

"Why you—" squawks the rooster. "I'll twist your tail-feathers, you buzzard!"

This is about all I can stand. So much happens to me that I am overwhelmed. I am not a man any more, and now even the chickens won't accept me. I feel like fighting. So I hand this bird a leer and a sneer.

"Are you a Leghorn?" I ask.

"Why, yes."

"Then blow!" I suggest.

For answer, the white rooster digs his legs into the gravel and straw and then flies into a rage—at me. His sharp beak bends in a peck of trouble.

I duck. And then the rooster flies over my head and lands and starts to chase me around the hen-house. He fights with his head and beak, and I am not used to this style of argument.

He chases me and the other hens cackle and the whole place is filled with screams. It sounds like the WLS Barn Dance on a rainy night. They laugh at me while I run.

But all the while I am dodging the rooster's pecks and figuring out a system. He corners me next to the feed-pan and then I turn.

The rooster makes a dive at my throat with his beak. And I merely balance on one claw and smack out with the other.

This is a kind of fighting a rooster isn't prepared for. I give him one hearty smack in the jaw—or craw. There is a crow, the sound of a blow, and then he starts to go.

In another moment he is a cold chicken.

I stand there and crow in triumph. The hens are quiet. They shrink back. I stalk over to them.

"Now we'll see who rules the roost around here," I snarl. "Let's get organized."

"Yes, sir," mumbles the Plymouth Rock.

"Whatever you say," says the speckled hen.

I flash her a look. "What are you brooding about?" I demand.

"Just a nest of eggs."

"Aha! That's what I'm interested in. Eggs. Let's get the lay of the land around here. How's production?"

"Not so hot," confesses a little red hen. "As a matter of fact—"

"Shhh!" I interrupt.

Because I hear voices in the yard. Human voices.

I SNEAK out of the hen-house and stick my beak through the barbed wire for a peek.

Sure enough, Daisy and her father, Al Falfa, are standing in the yard. They are holding a violent conversation, with that big lout, Luke the Duke, on the violent end.

He has on his zoot overalls and a barnyard homburg hat.

"Well, here I am," he is saying. "Last night Daisy says she will give me her answer today. What's it going to be—will you marry me or not?"

Daisy gives him a long look. Then she stamps her foot. "No!" she snaps. "I will not marry you because (a) I do not love you and (b) I hate you."

Luke the Duke turns red. He also turns to Al Falfa. "All right," he growls. "Then tomorrow I foreclose on this farm."

"But can't you wait?" sighs Al Falfa. "You don't need the money. And you won't run this chicken farm anyway. You are just doing it out of spite."

"Never mind," sneers Luke the Duke.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I have the law on my side and I'm getting what's coming to me."

"I hope so," whispers Daisy. "That's what they have a devil for."

Al Falfa takes a look around the farmyard and shrugs his shoulders. "Very well," he says. "Tomorrow morning I will get up early and take all the chickens and eggs into town and sell them, at a loss, if I must. I will raise some money if it's humanly possible. Because I would hate to lose this farm.

"It's a good farm. I can't understand why I have such bad luck with chicken-thieves and such, but I know if I stay here long enough, I will win out. But—"

He shrugs again and turns away.

"You have until tomorrow," snaps Luke the Duke. "Pay up or shut up."

Daisy glares at him. She stamps her foot again—this time right on his instep. Luke the Duke howls, curses, and limps away to his car. He climbs in and drives off.

Daisy starts to cry and Al Falfa comforts her. They go into the house.

"That's the guy," whispers the little red hen, under her beak.

"Who? What?" I inquire.

"That guy there—that fellow who drives off in the car."

"What about him?"

"He's the one who comes in here at night," the little red hen tells me. "He steals the eggs, and he runs off with dozens of the girls." She shivers. "I'm afraid of him!"

"You mean he robs the henhouse?" I gasp. "He steals chickens?"

"Right," cackles the hen.

It is all clear to me now. No wonder Al Falfa is in debt to Luke the Duke! Every time he is ready to pay off by selling eggs or chickens, Luke the Duke sneaks in and steals birds or eggs. Luke the Duke is a racketeer, a hijacker—a chickenlegger! That's what he is, a chickenlegger!

Now Daisy and Al Falfa will be thrown out on their ears as a result.

Unless—

I DO some winking, blinking, and plain and fancy thinking. I remember that Al Falfa promises to sell all the chickens early tomorrow morning. If not, it's his neck. I understand that.

But if he does sell the chickens—it's my neck! I will be sold, and a big rooster like me won't last long in a poultry market!

It is a bad spot, and I am on it, all right.

I pace the barnyard floor. It gets to be twilight, then dark.

I am still thinking. The hens all brood, and the other roosters keep away. I know they share my fear.

There must be something we can do. But what?

Late at night I am still up and stewing. Who knows, by tomorrow night I may really be stewing!

Comes midnight, and no idea.

Comes midnight and comes—the truck.

I hear the motor chugging far away. Al Falfa and Daisy are in bed long ago in the house. But this motor comes from the road.

"Oh, oh!" cackles a Buff Orpington. "It looks like trouble!"

It looks like Luke the Duke to me. He parks a truck on the side of the road near the farmhouse and tiptoes into the barnyard. Behind him comes a little colored personality—evidently his assistant roost-robber, because he is carrying a wire-clippers and a lot of gunnysacks.

"I'm a dead pigeon!" wails the little red hen. Which is not so far from the truth. "I'm a gone goose!" she moans. "Can't you think of anything we can

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

do?"

I do not answer this remark, because to tell the uncouth truth, I can already see myself lying across a butcher's block.

We huddle there in the henhouse while Luke the Duke and his colored helper cut the wires.

"Maybe if we all cackle at the top of our lungs they will be scared away," suggests the Rhode Island Red.

"Uh-uh," I hastily disagree. "All that will happen is Luke the Duke will wring our necks and drop us into the gunnysacks. Better keep quiet and hope for the best."

The best is none too good.

In a minute, Luke the Duke is inside the hencoop. He beckons to his shadow.

"Come on, Whitey!" he whispers. "Grab a handful of hens!"

Which is just what Whitey does. We run around the roost, dodging and fluttering our wings, but Whitey piles chicken after chicken into the gunnysacks. He carries them out to the truck. Meanwhile, Luke the Duke starts loading eggs into crates.

I hide in the back with the little red hen, the Rhode Island Red rooster, the Buff Orpington, and the speckled hen. The last gunnysack is filled up and the last egg is crated away, and I breathe a sigh of relief. Maybe they will go away and leave us behind.

Whitey says, "We all loaded, boss. De truck is filled up. We gonna mosey along now?"

Luke the Duke scratches his head—a job I would like to do for him, with an axe—and then he frowns. "We must take the rest of the birds," he decides, pointing at us in the darkness. "Don't want that old fool to have anything left tomorrow. I want that big rooster there, particularly. Never saw such an overgrown hunk of white meat in my life."

He points at me and I shiver. I can just feel him plucking at my wishbone.

"We can't do it nohow, boss," drawls Whitey. "Room is one thing we ain't got nothing of left."

"Wait a minute," hisses Luke the Duke. "What about that car I see parked in the yard? It must belong to that dumb jerk salesman I meet here the other evening. We can take that. Just load the rest of these chickens in the back and off we go."

"Good idea," says Whitey.

I DO not think it is such a good idea To be taken to the butcher in a car stolen from me is somehow a little unjust, I figure.

But I have nothing to say. I can only tackle a cackle as Luke the Duke makes a dive and tackles me.

I race around the coop and he chases me around the group. Finally he embraces me and I'm in the soup. He carries me out to the car and dumps me in the back seat.

"What a bird!" he whispers. "Big and fat—he'll make a real meal."

Whitey comes along with the speckled hen, the Buff Orpington, the Rhode Island Red, and the little red hen. They also get a thumping and a dumping in the back seat. When we are safe inside, Luke the Duke says, "Let's go."

"Go?" says Whitey.

"Sure. You drive this car and I'll drive the truck. Follow me and I'll meet you."

"Meet me where, boss?"

"Up the highway at the black market."

"Black market?" quavers the colored personality. "You-all don't mention we is gonna sell these birds to no black market."

"Sure," Luke the Duke answers. "I got a friend who pays good prices. Name of Blucher the Butcher. By sunrise this morning he'll have these birds

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dead, cleaned, plucked and on their way to town."

That is really something to look forward to. I always know I will be dead some day, but getting cleaned and plucked is not exactly what I expect. I may go to town after that, but I doubt if I will feel like it.

But there it is, and there am I. In the back seat of the car, as Whitey drives off and we fly away down the highway.

"Poor Al Falfa!" sighs the little red hen. "How he will miss us!"

"Poor us!" I groan. "How we will miss ourselves!"

The Rhode Island Red cackles to me. "What's the matter with you, you chicken-hearted lummox? Why you're almost four times as big as any of us birds. Why don't you put up some kind of a fight?

"I remember you tell us you will try to save us from this monster. And what do you do? Nothing! You won't let us cackle or run away or peck at those thieves, or anything. No—we just get caught and now we will be killed. A lot of good you're doing, big as you are."

FOR SOME reason his words make me just a little bit ashamed. And for another reason his words make me just a little bit inflamed. Because I get a sudden idea.

It is true I am bigger than any other chicken. Even if it does not help me, I am big.

Why am I big? Because I drink Wooster's Rooster Booster. If I, a human, turn into a big chicken—what will happen if chickens drink the stuff? It is an elixir to increase their size. And we are now riding in the back seat of my car—the car where I store my stock of the elixir!

"Cockadoodle-doo!" I yell, in triumph. "I get a great idea!"

"What are you crowing about?" sniffs the Buff Orpington.

"Listen," I cackle. "Down on the floor of this car is a suitcase filled with bottles. I am going to peck it open now. I will take out a bottle and use my beak for a corkscrew. I want you all to take a drink from that bottle."

"Huh!" scoffs the Rhode Island Red. "I ask for help and he tells us to get drunk! You think I want to face the last day of my life with a big head?"

"How would you like to face it with a big body?" I come back.

"What do you mean?" the rooster inquires.

I explain. Before I am finished, they cackle with joy, and swoop down on the suitcase. I start to work my beak and peck the lock.

Then I manage to pry the cork out of a big bottle of Rooster Booster. Meanwhile we bump down the road and Whitey drives and sings, not paying any attention to our clucking and jumping.

"Drink," I whisper to my feathered friends.

They gulp and ulp.

"Again!" I command. They nuzzle and guzzle.

The bottle is empty. The chickens are full.

And then I look out of the car window at the pale light of dawn—

"Too late!" I gasp. "We're here."

And here we are. Ahead of us, Luke the Duke is swinging his truck into a yard. We turn into the driveway behind the truck.

Standing there in the yard of a big farmhouse is at least 900 ration-points of pork in the shape of Blucher the Butcher. At least I guess this bald-headed buzzard is the black sheep of the black market—partly because he wears white, and party because he carries a big axe in one hand. He looks entirely

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too cleaver to suit me.

My hen friends let out a wail and turn pale. It looks like we fail and I start to quail.

Luke the Duke is whispering to Blucher the Butcher. First he shows him the truck full of gunnysacks and egg crates. Blucher opens up a few crates and sacks and pulls out a chicken or two and pinches them hard. They squawk and Luke the Duke starts to talk, and Blucher the Butcher takes a walk—in our direction.

Whitey climbs out of the car and joins them and they are bargaining. I can see that.

I can also see something else. "Look!" gasps the little red hen. I stare at her.

The little red hen is not so little any more. Even as I watch her, she starts to swell. Her head and body bulges. I stare at the Buff Orpington. She grows, too. She is almost as big as I am. Then the speckled hen puffs up. They shoot up all around me.

Skeetch and Meetch will be pleased to see how their elixir works on real chickens, I figure. In a few moments all of the chickens are bigger than I am —and they don't stop at that!

The Rhode Island Red is growing and growing. And all at once I must crane my neck to look up at him.

"Success!" I cackle. I get ready to issue orders, but I see there is no need to. They know what to do.

LOOKING out the window again, I see Luke the Duke pointing at our car. He is probably winding up his sales talk, telling Blucher the Butcher what a wonderful big rooster he has to sell him. Blucher the Butcher waves his big arms in the air and then walks our way. Whitey runs ahead to open our car door.

He arrives and pulls the door open.

"Here's de rooster, boss," he announces. Then he looks in. "Eeeyaaah!" he comments. "De chickens done begin to thicken!"

It is all too true.

Out of the car pours a horde of giant chickens—six feet tall!

I hop behind—because I cannot keep up with either the chickens or Whitey. Whitey starts to run behind the Buff Orpington, then the Rhode Island Red kicks him in the head.

Luke the Duke and Blucher the Butcher take one look and then to their heels. And at the heels of those heels are my fine feathered friends.

They chase the two racketeer black marketeers around the yard and there is plenty of cackling and feathers flying—only this time the cackling comes from the two men, not the chickens.

And feathers fly when the chickens start kicking them into the ground.

"Monsters!" howls Luke the Duke. "Help!"

Blucher the Butcher swings his axe at the speckled hen, but I jump up and peck him from the rear. His swing goes wild and so does he as he falls down and the little red hen points a beak at his beak.

To make a long story short, in a few seconds it is all over for the roost-robbers.

The birds are excited enough to murder these guys, but I put a stop to it. "Let's not have any fowl play," I tell them. "Just grab these bum's shirt collars in your beaks and haul them into the truck." Which they do, in a flurry of hurry.

After that we all lay down for a nap and several of the little chickens lay down for an egg.

When we shake awake the sun is around seven in the heavens. I raise my hands and rub my eyes.

This surprises me.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Because I now have hands to rub my eyes with!

I glance down at my body.

I am still a chicken. But a chicken with arms.

As I glance further, I noice that I am moulting, or something. Either that or somebody plucks me while I am asleep. Because I am losing my feathers—or my mind, or something.

Anyhow, I am not much of a chicken any longer.

"Look at him!" cackles the Plymouth Rock. "I never see such an odd-looking bird!" The other chickens wake up and stare.

"Never mind me," I snap back. "Look, now—we've got to decide what to do. Those crooks are captured, but now you must make up your minds about your own futures. Where do you want to go?"

"Back to Al Falfa, of course," suggests the Rhode Island Red. "He's a good old scout and he won't harm us. Besides, he needs the eggs and stuff. Also—we're not safe running around loose and when you're six feet tall the way I am, you have to scratch for a living. I vote we go back there and get something to eat."

"Good idea!" adds the Buff Orpington. The others join in.

This suits me. Having arms, I can now drive the truck. So I load the birds back into the truck. Some of them ride in the front with me and the rest make a nest on the bodies of Luke the Duke, Whitey, and Blucher the Butcher, in the back.

In a few minutes we glide off and ride off down the road.

MY FEET are numb, but when I look down I can see toes instead of claws. I shed feathers faster than a punched-out pillow, and looking in the mirror I see that my beak turns into a nose and my wattles are getting epiglottal. The further we go the further I go towards returning to manhood.

By the time we pull into the farmyard I can say "Today I am a man," without crowing about it. Matter of fact, I am so human I can't even talk to the chickens any more or understand them.

It is hard enough for me to understand what happens. I finally decide on the ride that something must happen to me inside.

Wooster's Rooster Booster is not for men anyway, and the dose I take probably wears off. On the chickens it still looks becoming—but with me it is very temporary. Which suits me swell.

It suits Al Falfa swell too when I turn up with his chickens and the knocked-out crooks. When he sees me he thinks I disappear a few nights ago just to hide out and capture Luke the Duke—so I let him believe that yarn.

Then when he sees the big chickens he is a pushover to buy the rest of my stock of Rooster Booster.

So the way it turns out, everybody is happy. The chickens are back in the roost, Al Falfa is back on the farm, Luke the Duke is back in the county jail, and I am back in the bucks. Also Daisy is back in my affections—after I manage to drape my shape in a blanket from the truck seat.

Of course I come back to town today to report to Skeetch and Meetch. All the way down I keep worrying, expecting to crow instead of talk, but I guess I am one hundred per cent a gent. . . .

LEFTY FEEP finished his yarn-spinning and I sat there, still dizzy from trying to follow it.

"I guess you are one hundred per cent a lunatic!" I told him. "I've stood for a lot of unbelievable stories from you in my time, but this is the most fan-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tastic. Lefty—do you expect me to swallow the idea that you turned into a chicken?"

Lefty Feep shrugged.

"There is nothing to swallow," he insisted. "Except Wooster's Rooster Booster. It changes me to a chicken but I am now completely normal again."

"I just can't believe it," I muttered. "Surely you couldn't turn from man to bird to man again without leaving some kind of evidence or clue."

Feep rose from his chair.

"Sorry," he said. "Too bad I cannot prove or improve my tale's details. But I do change from a chicken to a man again without leaving a trace."

He beamed and winked. "I am glad I am no longer a chicken, too!"

"I'm not so sure of that," I gasped.

"What do you mean?"

I pointed a trembling finger at the seat of Lefty Feep's chair. "There's your evidence," I groaned. "Now I believe it—I believe you were a chicken, but I'm afraid you're not back to normal quite as much as you think. Look what happened while you told your story!"

We stared together at the seat of the chair—the seat of the chair where Lefty Feep had sat telling his story and . . . laying an egg!

THE END

THE TRUTH ABOUT VAMPIRES

By ANDREW LONDON

ONE of the most stimulating subjects brought to the eyes of the mystery fan is the vampire bat. This creature of the dark has provided the inspiration for many eerie tales and has wormed its way into innumerable others. Contrary to ordinary belief, the vampire bat does not belong to the author's imagination alone; known scientifically as Desmodus, it is capable of doing all that has been attributed to it. The fact that this species of bat subsists solely upon a diet of fresh blood which is consumed from the sleeping bodies of live victims provides the fundamental reason why this tiny black winged creature is regarded with horror. Scientists have substantiated the claims made by fiction writers.

Raymond L. Ditmars and Arthur M. Greenhall ventured into the Chilibrillo Caves of Panama to capture specimens for laboratory study. Their observations added much to the history of the Desmodus. Other men who tackled the problem earlier were Charles Darwin, Dr. Herbert C. Clark, and Dr. William Beebe. In 1934 Professor F. W. Urich was engaged in an investigation of the transmission of paralytic rabies by vampire bats in British Guiana. The research of these men has brought to light many interesting facts.

The bats' favorite feeding time is during the night. In the daylight hours it hangs head downward from the top of its cage or cave. In order to feed, the bat will leave its hanging position and assume a four-legged walking gait using its two wings as feet. The peculiarly soft gait of the animal makes possible its habit of prowling over a sleeping victim in seeking a spot to use the highly perfected teeth in starting a flow of blood. The bat does not suck blood as is commonly believed. Instead, the blood is lapped up with its unusually long tongue. Nightly, the bat returns to an old wound on the same victim for its feeding. The bat gorges himself to such a degree that his body becomes almost spherical. The vampire's most common victims in real life are animals. They attack cattle, swine, and poultry.

Under close observation it was noted that goats and fowls do not seem to mind being bitten. This is probably due to the fact that the bite of the vampire bat is remarkably painless, and its movements are so gentle and slight that its presence is almost imperceptible to the touch. Human victims have stated that they would have remained ignorant of such a happening had they not found blood stains the following morning. In a shack near the Chilibrillo Caves a ten year old boy was found who had been bitten five times during a week, and always on the under surface of his toes while he slept. He had bled profusely, and the earthen floor beneath his slatted bed was blood-stained each morning.

The vampire bat is truly a creature to inspire horror. In its native haunts it is surrounded by the darkness of slimy cave walls. It is found in the suitable company of huge roaches and tropical spiders. The hushed flapping of the bat's wings through the otherwise silent night on its quest for liquid nourishment has caused many a hair to stand on end—and rightly so!

* * *

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continued from page 53)

the cold black eyes and the hammy sideburns, he knew there was only one way to meet this emergency and keep sane: he must think of himself as temporarily perfectly *disguised*—disguised as Manson Towers, to consider the other as disguised as himself; further, not to think of what might lie ahead, take what might come step by step.

CHAPTER XIII

Presenting Norah

ARRIVING at Grand Central, in their ill-fitting garments, Doren suggested they leave the station and walk toward the East Side. On Third Avenue the two entered a "Suits Pressed While You Wait" establishment. Tompkins waved a five dollar bill in front of the proprietor. It was his if the suits in the suitcase were pressed and ready to wear in twenty minutes.

"It's a deal," said the man, and he went rapidly to work.

In fifteen minutes Doren and Tompkins went behind a curtain, and got into their own clothing. Next, a substation of the railway express was found. The suitcase, with the loaned clothing, was expressed back to the owner in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Doren's banking place was a national establishment on a Fifth Avenue corner near 42nd Street. He and Tompkins went in together. Doren signed a blank counter check, made it out to the other for eight thousand dollars and slipped it carelessly along the long glass counter. No one noticed as Tompkins picked it up endorsed it and strolled over to the paying teller's cage. The teller called the manager, who had known the servant for many years. The bank official placed a little v and his initials upon a corner of the check. Tompkins walked out, and Doren followed him, thinking he would have been arrested as a forger if anyone had been interested enough to notice him writing the check and passing it along the counter.

Over on Broadway, a few blocks further downtown, the two men entered a branch of another bank. There an account for seven thousand dollars was opened. Either the signature of William Tompkins or Manson Towers would be enough for a check to be cashed. Tompkins gave his true address, and Doren gave that of Towers, as on his card, 444 Park Avenue.

Doren pocketed six hundred dollars of the remaining thousand and insisted that Tompkins take the remaining four hundred, even though he protested.

"Write a check when you need any more. Now go home and serve your new master in the most untrustworthy manner possible. Keep in touch with me by outside telephone at my office, using the name of Bower. You are my right bower. Give me, then, the number you are calling from, in an off-hand manner, so it has no meaning to anyone—and in ten minutes I'll call there from outside. I'll call you only if I'm in danger."

Outside the bank Tompkins gazed at him wistfully.

"Yeah, I know how you feel—you think I'm going into the lion's den. Maybe—but perhaps it is the safest place there is, old man—when the lion is not at home."

The two shook hands warmly.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was as though another personality was in his eyes . . .

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tompkins turned quickly and was ten paces away when Doren called him back. He told him, in a low tone, that during the switch in bodies, he had lost everything on his person. "Get another key to the back door made this morning. Put it in an envelope and send it by messenger to Mr. Towers at his Park Avenue office. It might be that back entrance, and the way leading to it, was as yet unknown to the enemy. An hour might arrive, you never could tell just when, that a visit might become imperative."

Tompkins nodded, without understanding.

Doren saw no need to inform him that, in his new disguise, he was another man—and felt like one! The time could come when he would want possession of the talisman, and there would be no use of having an argument about that beforehand.

IT WAS curious how very alone Doren felt walking away from Tompkins. He tried to understand. Yes, every man, unconscious of it as he might be, had a background, whether in the country, a small town, or a city, where he fitted in—a part of the whole, familiar with his little or large role. There were certain acquaintances, friends, business associates, and relatives—all in a scale of importance or unimportance, but you knew where you belonged.

Now, of course, all that had been taken from him; the Doren Grahame he had taken for granted as himself, had been stolen from him. In turn he had been thrown into the guise of Manson Towers. It was like being cast into a new and unpleasing world. Knowing nothing about the other's past, but determined to find out about it, he was going to Tower's office unprepared and certain to be baffled. The only thing, thought Doren, is to take it easy, not to make early breaks.

Certainly, by now, Dr. Leonard knew of his escape. But the knowledge, because of secrecy on the invention, must place him and other of the plotters in the know in a peculiar dilemma. The doctor couldn't claim he was an impostor. And who would listen if he claimed that another man's being inhabited Towers' body?

No, I shall have a little time, figured Doren. He entered a taxi. When the car drew up in front of the office building, he paid the driver, walked inside, and looked up Manson Towers' office number and floor on the board. The starter half saluted. Doren tried to smile. The lips felt stiff. The lips weren't in the habit of smiling.

"Tenth floor," he said to the elevator man.

The operator looked at him with faint surprise. Of course, thought Doren he knows my floor.

That was a little slip. He mustn't make important ones.

Doren got off at the tenth floor, waited until the elevator had shot down before he started looking for 1040. Down the right, then a turn to the left:

MANSON TOWERS
SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT
SERVICES

His right hand felt moist as he turned the knob of the door. He entered a little outer office. There was a table at the left, with a telephone. A tiny woman's handkerchief was crushed upon a pad of paper. Before him he saw three doors; that at the right was the only one with any lettering on opaque glass: Private. He judged that must be Towers' own office.

Well, you couldn't go wrong. This

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

layout all belonged to Towers. He walked quickly to the right door, opened it.

It was the usual office, with a desk and chairs, and a filing cabinet; but the woman with her back turned wasn't usual he learned, as her skirt twirled and she faced him. She was a brilliant blonde in her early thirties, all glossy and enameled, with a smile professionally radiant as she came toward him with outstretched arms.

"Manson, darling, you are late," she breathed in a clipped voice.

As Doren took her into his arms, sniffing a rose perfume almost overpowering, and bent to fasten his lips upon her own in a fashion that might well pass for passionate, he wasn't playing a part. *It was a habit of the former Manson Towers. The man must have enjoyed embracing and kissing this creature. Doren, thrust into his body, was through habit continuing with the motions.*

Who in the devil is this siren, thought Doren? And, I hope this sort of thing doesn't get biological in function! What am I into?

"You should have telephoned your darling Norah," she drawled, withdrawing herself from his arms with a satisfied shrug of her shoulders.

"Yes, Norah," Doren said hastily, "but I have been feeling poorly this morning. You know I had to run up to Connecticut——"

He ventured that, hoping Towers had no secrets from the rose-perfumed blonde who now flung herself into a chair by the window and crossed legs anyone would admit were well worth crossing. Maybe a bit of admiration would do no harm.

"You have swell gams, Norah, as the Americans say."

"So I've been told by experts. But you are not going to evade me about your trip; those mysterious hints you let fall have intrigued me. Now I want to know what happened."

Doren patted her bare arm as he passed her, slipped in behind the table and reached involuntarily for his side pocket.

"Cigarettes are in the top drawer, darling," she said, a bit sharply. "Remember, you said you'd stop carrying a pack because you have been smoking too much."

DOREN nodded. He was trying to think quickly as he pulled open the drawer, took a pack from a carton, selected a cigarette, and reached for a metal matchstand on the table. Damn it, this was unforseen. He had thought of what he wanted to learn about Manson Towers and his activities. You couldn't evade this kind of a gal—the kind that has some kind of emotional right to ask questions. Why, if he wasn't careful he wouldn't be getting anywhere! This woman was no fool.

Doren put his hand to his forehead.

"I have a terrible headache, Norah. Have you anything for it?"

"You know there is a box of pills in that drawer, too, darling. I'll run and get you a little water to take with a dose."

He opened the drawer again and reached for a little blue box he found there. Norah turned and smiled at him from the doorway, and then she half stretched and went on, with a slight sway of the hips that showgirls and models learn. She was back in a minute, with half a glass of water. As she handed it to him, Doren bent his head, turned over the palm of her hand and kissed it lightly.

That was habit for you. He had never done anything like that in *his* life before. It must have been one of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the little tricks of that wolf, Manson Towers.

Norah snatched her hand away, flashed a brilliant smile as her crimson lips parted.

"Always the continental," she said in almost a purr.

Doren took two pills and the water. These Manson Towers habits were getting him in deeper and deeper. Was the real Manson Towers, in his body, seeking to relieve a terrible whiskey thirst? That was no matter. Here was no escape, save for some off-hand lying.

She leaned over, patted his knee.

"Tell mama. There was a scheme on that might mean the quick restoration of you-know-what from that Captain Grahame you have safe and sound up in the sanitorium. You look blue and grouchy, even with your pet nearby. You didn't yet get it back. Just what did happen?"

CHAPTER XIV

The Missed Clue

DOREN gazed at Norah, using Towers' eyes—but his own mind. He estimated that she possessed superb confidence in her own attractions; they must have had, great success on previous occasions. She had a cold calculating mind, and used sex like a weapon. For however long a time he didn't know, as yet, Towers must have fallen for her heavily. He hoped she wasn't his outright mistress. There were some lengths he wasn't prepared to go. . . .

Just how much did she already know? Considerably more than he did, in any case. The only thing, obviously, was to shoot a line of lies *first*, instead of lies, after the truth came out, as a defensive come-back. But he must build falsity upon a frame-work of facts that could partly be checked.

"You wonder, Norah, that I have a bad taste in the mouth. You know all about the snatching of Captain Grahame up to that place of Doctor Leonard's near Diaryton, on Long Island Sound. Sure, I went up there, after being summoned. The rest of what happened sounds as if out of a hashish dream. There was a Professor Diettrum there who had rigged up some kind of an electrical invention by which he claimed he could transfer souls—personalities—whatever is represented by *I*, from one human body to another."

"Professor Diettrum is supposed to be a scientific genius."

"Perhaps so, darling; but the experiment he tried yesterday failed. The idea was to have Doren Grahame's soul become disembodied through some electrical magnetic force—mine, too—and the two individualties were to change places. Thus I would be, seemingly, Captain Grahame. I could go to his home; allow habit to assert itself so I could lay hands upon the token, or persuade the servant to remember, for me, where it had been hidden.

"That was the plot. After the exchange my body was to be kept imprisoned—until the change back.

But the experiment was a failure. When I came to consciousness I was just myself again. Doctor Leonard was so confident the invention would do the impossible he had informed Grahame's uncle the nephew had recovered from the nervous break-down and was ready to be released. After the professor's scheme failed to produce results, Captain Grahame was returned to his cell and I left the sanitorium.

"Sometime last night I had an overpowering hunch. I called up Doctor Leonard. What do you think had happened?"

"You don't mean . . . ?" she asked,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leaning forward.

"Yes, my love, Grahame had escaped, with outside help, of course. Three men, I believe, in the rescue party. I imagine they had a car waiting."

She gave Doren a suspicious glance.

"I see, Manson. And what time did you get back to the city?"

"Why do you ask that? Upon my return I tried to get a line on what Captain Grahame and that man of his were doing?"

"I didn't see you at the Cafe Mordant. He was there, in uniform, looking very pleased and swagger. And who do you think was draped on his arm, with the smile of a princess after meeting the fairy prince?"

Doren's heart fell, as he guessed.

"Virginia Boriza," he murmured dryly. "And if it weren't for that girl we wouldn't be in all this mess."

"You were not supposed to have been held up from being on hand at the start of that auction. You got there too late—and then you bid a miserable two hundred dollars."

"I didn't want to arouse suspicion. At a glance the token has no value in itself."

"I know. Anyway, you bungled the job, my beloved. Even with the best safe-guards in the world something can go wrong. Here was Maldern Baerton, in this country, the one key man who knew the secret. He died suddenly of a heart attack. He had it all memorized, in so far as we know; for in going over his effects there was not a clue to be found. The secret was known to just two men abroad, in a certain mysterious department. They sent over the token, of course, with Virginia Borzia, an exchange passenger on the *Gripsholm*, and with the token in your possession you were to take over.

"Of course Grahame has the token. However certain of its importance, he will never learn why or how. But in the meantime, he holds the one clue left in the entire world."

Doren kept silent, attempting merely to look interested and attentive.

"You are aware what happened. The building in which the two men were stationed was hit with a two-ton block buster and they were buried in the ruins with the secret. The three key men are gone who can supply the . . . oh, it is maddening. . . ."

YES, thought Doren, it is maddening all right. He was eager to ask what he was supposed to know:—*why* the talisman was the pivot, and to what. But unquestionably he was supposed to know all that.

"Too bad they happened to be in the same building."

"Yes, just for a conference. So Borzia was the courier with the token. It should have been taken from her, at least as soon as she reached her rooms; but the F.B.I. kept a watch on certain passengers, on the *Gripsholm* for weeks after their arrival in the United States. It is a kind of cat and mouse game—they are allowed to land, apparently at liberty, after a long cross examination on the ship—the idea being that, careless, in a great city, they may incriminate not only themselves but others as well. We had to take that into account. That charity auction would have been a natural for the token to get into your hands. Your car breaks down and that Captain Grahame . . ."

She shrugged graceful shoulders.

"You don't think he has any F.B.I. connection?"

"We've been into that. We know his record from high school days. He was a football player in college. After graduation he was with his uncle, and then into the U.S. Army Air Force, until

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wounded in the Solomons. A pleasant enough chap, it appears, if not overbright and intelligent."

Doren smiled crookedly. With the little finger of his right hand he found himself lightly scratching the top of his head. One of Towers' silly habits, no doubt.

So he wasn't over-bright and intelligent. Perhaps not, but he was learning things without asking the questions he yearned to ask. To just what was the talisman the key—and how could it be used? Was Virginia Borzia on the side of the enemy—the one type of person sought on an exchange ship, an undercover courier? Or was she in the plot because of a reason that, though outworn because of repetition, still had force in a world of force: was someone she loved threatened by death unless she followed orders that she didn't, very naturally, understand?

The telephone upon his desk rang. He reached for it, but Norah's hand darted out first, in a business like manner, and she nodded to him as if to say, I'll take it.

Yes, Doren thought, you take it, and anything else in sight that tickles your fancy.

"Hello. This is Mr. Towers' offices. Miss Norah Serwin speaking."

Her voice had the sweet lilt of a mechanical doll. You knew the sugar was artificial.

"You wish to speak to him personally? Who is this?"

A pause.

"You don't wish to give the name. Well, I'm not going into a guessing contest. This is not an information bureau, either. Mr. Towers speaks only to those whom he knows. Oh, Tom Bower."

She looked at Doren enquiringly. He nodded, reached for the phone.

"Hello," he began, cautiously. "Yes, I understand. . . . Yes, it may be so, though why I can't understand. . . . Humph. I'll do as you suggest."

HE PUT down the 'phone, frowned. Then he got up, with determination, said something about seeing Norah later and walked from the room, taking with him the glimpse he had caught of a half startled but thoroughly surprised expression on her face.

Well, Doren was sorry not to be true to type. Towers seemingly had played tame doggie and jumped through a hoop made by her thumb and forefinger; but a man could change, and she'd have to attribute his new-found initiative to that. Other changes might be called for in a not too distant future. . . . Manson Towers, surely, had been attracted to her violently—*his body still was attracted!* Doren would have to fight against that. The new lodger had different notions.

Downstairs, he found a long line of pay telephones, called the number Tompkins had given him.

"Hello, that you, Bower? You reached me while half in and half out of the clutches of a would-be blonde siren with whom my predecessor was mightily taken. He was a kind of male slave. The prospects are not intriguing."

Doren gazed out the little square of glass. Then he opened the door, saw that the corridor was deserted, closed it again.

"One died here of heart failure. Two abroad from a block buster. Those three alone had the secret of whatever it is the talisman discloses. Now, why the call?"

"Captain Grahame has gone out to see his uncle. I thought you'd like to know. That wasn't why I telephoned. I'm in the way around here. His next move will be to discharge me. That would leave this house to him, and he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can tear it up inch by inch. No cunning can keep anything hidden in that kind of a search. I've suspected right along that we are dealing with enemy agents, even if native born. You can't go now to the F.B.I. Nor I to British Military Intelligence. Our story sounds woozy. But he . . . you, as you were . . . will die before I leave this post, my lad."

Doren felt his lower jaw fall. He realized that he had been living in unwarranted optimism. Always he had figured that somehow there would come a switch back to his rightful self again.

"Do you know what you are saying —that you would kill *me*."

"No, I'm talking to the real you. All a chap has is a body, worse or better than normal, sometimes that of a cripple with the soul of a poet, or an Apollo front concealing the aspirations of a jackass. It might all be in self defense, understand. Why, you never knew when you'd be killed, *entirely,* at the front. Here you would die only physically."

"It is entirely different," Doren heard himself saying. "There must be a way to find evidence that would be believed and acted upon by proper authorities."

"I deemed it only just that I warn you. Anything drastic must be inevitable, or I'll dodge it. See what you can do, quickly."

"So long," said Doren, and he hung up with trembling fingers.

Tompkins, he reflected, is made of sterner stuff than I—but then he isn't in any such a mix-up. Without doubt speed was indicated. Quickly, he thumbed through the telephone book, found the number of *News Action Magazine,* a weekly, dropped another nickel in the slot and dialed. To the switchboard girl at the publication, he explained that he was an army officer just back from the front. He desired information about a prominent figure who had died—he had heard—in the last few months—a friend of his father—Maldern Baerton.

THE girl gave him the editor of the obituary department. That gentleman had names and dates, in a file at hand. Maldern Baerton, the great Swedish financier, had left the Bahamas under some kind of a cloud, boarding one of the few remaining yachts that were ocean going. No evidence, but it had been rumored several of the companies with which he was connected had been unduly friendly with the Germans. His ship has gone to Mexico, where it had anchored in an obscure harbor, and Baerton has suffered a fatal heart attack. Always glad to oblige any one in the services. Yes, Baerton was rumored to have been a multi-millionaire.

Doren thanked him, hung up. He quickly stepped outside and caught the eye of a taxi driver. Stepping into the cab he mumbled Manson Towers' home address. It was in the Nineties, several blocks above where Virginia Borzia resided. He paid the taxi off in front of a semi-smart apartment house boasting a canvas canopy to the gutter.

Walking in, Doren smiled at a Negro elevator boy and asked him to bring the superintendent, for he had lost his key. In two minutes a dapper little fellow appeared from the basement. True, he had a duplicate key. Doren reached his hand into his pocket, nodded, asked him to come upstairs. Thus he made the other lead him to an apartment on the fifth floor he would have been unable to locate without asking embarrassing questions.

"How would you like to make twenty dollars in an hour?" Doren asked.

"Very much. You wouldn't suggest anything that would cost me my job?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Of course not. Tell me, have you a vacant apartment?"

"Yes, but new tenants will move in tomorrow."

"They won't even learn, then, of what I suggest. I can't explain, but it may be dangerous for me if someone has gained possession of my lost key. I can't be here all the time, and there are valuable papers; I mean valuable to me. I wish you to change locks. Take this one to the vacant apartment, bring the one there to mine. You can get another key or keys, made for the new tenants."

"That can be done right away, sir."

"Okay. Here is twenty-five dollars. The extra five for speed and because under no conditions is anyone to be allowed to enter my place while I'm away. You understand?"

The man took the bills and hurried off. Doren stepped inside. There was a little kitchen at the right, a box of a waiting room at the left; a hall between led to a sitting room, and beyond was a bed chamber and a bathroom. Rented furnished, it all said plainly, for no personality showed in the choice of anything. Towers, he concluded, must spend scant time here, aside from sleeping. No magazines, no books. A cheap radio, perhaps put in for guests by the management.

Doren went to the bedroom, inspected the closet and the bureau drawers. A choice of good suits, ample shirts and so on. What one would expect of a more or less prosperous bachelor.

The superintendent had the lock off the other door and on Towers' in half an hour. He gave over two keys that went with it. Locking himself in, Doren was relieved in one way. A fire violation, but there was no fire escape. Now, sleeping in he wouldn't have the jitters expecting someone to let himself in during the night. Quickly he started with the clothes closet and bureau, ended by looking under the rugs and taking apart picture frames. His search disclosed absolutely nothing.

Doren hadn't really expected to find anything incriminating; but to come across no papers, no bills of any kind, was unusual to be sure; he had gone through the search because he felt it might be unwise for him to sneer at the obvious. That was that. He wanted more information. Where might he get it?

There was, of course, only one possible answer: Virginia Borzia. As Doren Grahame he knew that he might have gone to her, with some chance of success. In all probability she despised Manson Towers, and with reason. She had once offered herself to Grahame, either to save him or to get the return of the talisman. Give vanity the play and decide that she acted from a fine impulse. Go to her and see how far you get. . . .

Even now the fake Doren Grahame might be stacking the cards against him. It was not only because of Tompkins' warning that he knew he must act quickly.

CHAPTER XV

Back to Virginia

DOREN took a bath, changed clothes, smoked a cigarette, feeling like a thief in another man's apartment. It was all right, of course, his own home now being occupied by an impostor; but he had that terrifying feeling that at any moment one of two things would happen: he would find himself a mad, deluded thing, or awaken to find himself back in a normal world. He could understand how unrelenting, stark reality could drive men to suicide.

Courage, take courage, he told himself. Any maze entered must have a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way out, if only the way you came in. You are fighting mere men, not the Fates believed in by the ancient Greeks. He thought of Norah. The Greeks weren't dumb, they knew women could be tougher than men to battle.

He realized that he had learned from Norah, without suspicious questioning, more than he might have hoped. The drawback would be, he feared, that he might well be expected to be conversant with details he knew nothing about whatever. Before the auction, and from then on only when contacted, he knew nothing about Manson Towers worth mentioning. It was difficult to pick up data as he went along. He might stumble and not be able to pull himself out of a hole.

With Virginia Borzia, Doren felt on surer ground. Whether she was one of the active plotters, or had been persuaded to participate through some secret pressure, he could not determine. But as Manson Towers, a sharer of certain knowledge, he might be able to make her talk to his advantage.

It was only a short walk to 9 West 90th Street, off Central Park West. Nurse-maids passed him, taking their charges into the paths lined with benches, backed with all the light greenery of spring. The breeze was balmy. How nice it would be if he were only Doren Grahame again, and calling upon Virginia, with all this mesh of lies and plots and enemies torn and destroyed like rotten rope.

In front of No. 9 he paused for a moment. The building was an old private house, no doubt remodeled into separate suites or small housekeeping flats.

He climbed the stone steps. In the hallway he saw brass letter boxes and buttons. He pressed the button under her name, waited. The door lock buzzed and he grabbed the handle and entered. Up at the head of the stairs a figure appeared. It was Virginia, in a peacock blue dressing gown of light flannel.

"Oh, it is you!" The tone had a tinge of disgust.

"There are reasons," Doren said lightly.

He climbed the stairs, followed her into a big sitting room at the rear of the building, noticing that she left the outer door open.

THE furniture had summer covers of chintz, and books and magazines were scattered everywhere. He took magazines from a chair, placed them upon a central table and seated himself, uninvited. The girl remained standing, and he smiled, as if to put her at ease.

"Oh, take it easy, Miss Borzia; we are all in this together. Close the door; I'm not going to bite you. Neither am I seeking to have my conversation overheard."

Virginia flushed. She crossed to the table, picked up a large handbag, opened it and flashed an ugly little snub nosed revolver.

"I have done what I have been forced to do, but if you ever touch me with your pawing hands again, I'll shoot you."

So! Norah had not been enough for Manson Peters. The swine had tried to force himself on Virginia.

"I'm a changed man," said Doren, "and my visit here is impersonal. Were you forced to go to the Cafe Mordant with Captain Grahame?"

A delicate frown touched her brow for an instant.

"I don't know what it is, Towers, but everything you breathe upon becomes slimy. What you have done—or others have done—to Captain Grahame, I cannot guess. When I met him I thought him a fine young American officer, with all the courtesy and chivalry of his

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

class, one I felt perfectly safe with, knowing, in his company, I should be guarded if not cherished.

"Last night he called—though how he found my address I do not understand—and asked me to go out with him. He was the same . . . yet somehow different. A fixed something of the eyes, and a pursing of the lips. I felt uneasy when we danced, and there was that same peculiar shrinking, when his hands touched me, that I had when you once dared to do so. . . ."

Doren nodded. So the expression had changed . . . and the soul was clear to read, to the sensitive, even in a different body.

He wondered if a microphone were in this room. Not likely, unless Virginia was still a suspect of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Slowly he spoke, weighing each word: "Virginia Borzia, I have the strangest of stories to tell you—but I wouldn't have dared confide in you unless you had spoken as you have about Captain Grahame. *You realized he was not the same personality you knew before,* instinctively you shrank from him.

"Now, I want you to make a test. First, pick up that bag of yours, take out that little revolver, and if you feel the same revulsion toward Manson Towers as you have felt in the past—shoot him like a mad dog."

She gasped. "I don't understand."

"You will never believe me without this test."

Doren jumped to his feet. He grabbed the handbag, opened it, took out the little revolver. He grasped her right hand, coiled the fingers about the butt of the weapon. She stood quietly, wonderingly; and then he went to her, feeling the barrel of the weapon pressing against his heart as his arms went around her and he kissed her upon the mouth.

SHE pushed him back slowly, using one hand and the barrel of the revolver, but she was more shocked and surprised than angry.

"That is my test," he said. "You didn't experience that shrinking you always knew. Why? *Because Manson Towers did not kiss you!* I am Doren Grahame, imprisoned through an exchange of souls in his body. Towers has mine; and that was why you felt so different. The essential personality, soul—call it what you will—shone through the flesh."

The girl trembled.

"Your—your test . . . it was true," she admitted in a small voice. "For Doren Grahame kissed me once; and this time there *was* something alike . . . . But what a nightmare story! . . . Still, last night I was turning to hate one I had admired. I will listen, anyway, for when I can get such entirely different reactions from two men, there *must* be an adequate explanation."

"Very well," said Doren, "then put away that revolver and sit down to listen to at least *part* of my story. You spoke of instinct. It may be you will betray me. But I must tell it to you—if only to warn you against the man inside my body, posing as myself! Also, with really no evidence to go on, I trust you, Virginia."

Her lips made a sound like a little moan.

"I am not a free agent—not in a position to be trusted. But go on."

Without pause Doren told her of all that had happened from the time he had been given the bonds and stocks, until after the escape and his scene with Norah.

Some obscure feeling of self protection made him keep to himself the telephone calls from and to Tompkins, and the fact he had had the lock changed on the door of Towers' apart-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment.

"Virginia, since I learned about the man who, alone, knew the secret, on this Continent, and that the two in the possession of it over-seas are also dead in an air raid, the knowledge gone with them—I am sure I am in the middle of some kind of an enemy plot. I'm not one of those amateur detectives who think themselves brighter than the trained real thing. I'd go down today to the New York branch of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but what have I got to go on? An ornament . . . and a story that seems straight out of bedlam.

"Upon the slightest of investigations the man in charge would believe the present Captain Doren Grahame, while I'd be adjudged insane. This is a case where I must get through the fog into the light, on my own, if I can last that long. . . ."

The girl sent him a glance that seemed freighted with pity and sympathy. She said:

"I shall tell you the truth—as much of the truth as I dare. I consented, under compulsion, to take that ornament along with me on the *Gripsholm*. The story about it having magic power was the one that was given me. You wonder how I was able to get upon the ship. The truth is I am an American citizen. I told you a lie. My mother did marry a French army officer—my step-father. My father died when I was ten years old. He had interests in Paris, so my mother stayed on; after her second marriage she lost her citizenship, I think, and in any case. . . I am patriotic, but what have I to offer as proof of enemy underground activity?"

DOREN read between her admissions, and it wasn't difficult to understand that the usual duress had been exerted; her mother was a hostage, and even if the F.B.I. wouldn't have excused her, she could . . .

Certain that he was in great danger, she had offered herself in marriage if he would return the talisman. If she had made the gesture merely as an effort to save him, he would not only excuse her, he would protect her.

That last impulse made his own helplessness too apparent.

"I wonder how soon the time given me will run out." he asked dryly. "Dr. Leonard may desire the invention to be kept somewhat of a secret. But the possessor of my body will have no such scruples."

She said: "Perhaps I didn't tell you. I think he called on me and persuaded me to go out with him last night because he had been attracted to me; as Manson Towers he knew he repelled me. He figured that as Doren Grahame it would be different. But, as I told you, instinct warned me. This is the feeling I had: under the surface he, too, is afraid. Unless you have lived abroad and understand such things, you cannot realize that we are dealing with an enemy entirely different from any known in previous history. Savage methods, brutality, torture—none of these are new; but these fiends are cold-blooded, they don't mind the pain and suffering of others, or even of their own kind if the machine thinks it necessary.

"The real Towers knows he is responsible for the loss of the talisman. He has been given a desperate chance to win its recovery. I imagine he has an amount of time that can run out like sand out of an hour glass."

"Then," stated Doren, "there exists someone more powerful than he who can administer punishment."

She nodded fearfully. "Someone unknown to me—and very likely unknown to him."

"You mean there may be a chapter

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the Gestapo in America?"

"I don't want to say—only *they* organize in segments, so that you can cut off one and the next exists by itself. Oh, they are wily and cunning and ruthless."

"If I only knew just what they were plotting toward," Doren mused. "What is the motive behind the secret? Just what is the missing piece in the jig-saw puzzle lost with the death of the three men? Yes, the talisman is the piece, if it could be fitted in or understood."

Doren explained that under a microscope of the jeweler's, nothing had been revealed to indicate code or cipher on the surface of the fish. Then he said:

"The two executives were killed while the *Gripsholm* was at sea no doubt. The financier had died before that, I know, in Mexico. If the fish were taken to the F.B.I., it would be examined without result, and I'd be asked for proof of my fantastic yarn. All my evidence would be that you had brought the ornament over from France. Thus you would be implicated and whoever you are protecting would suffer the consequences. Too, you would be asked why you did withhold what you knew from the investigators who cross-examined every passenger before he or she was allowed to leave the exchange ship. Virginia, I need hard, solid facts."

"I fear you will never live to report them."

HE LOOKED at her gratefully, for there was a desperate tenderness in her voice. Why, he thought, hadn't he originally met and loved a girl like Virginia, instead of a social will-o'-the-wisp like Katherine? Met and loved her in a normal, humdrum way. A fellow asking for excitement gets more than he bargains for.

"This morning, talking to Norah before any revealing word was given to her, I realized a clue was flashed to me. I've concentrated, but it eludes me like quicksilver under a finger. Now I must go, Virginia, before I implicate you in any way. It has been wonderful, your believing me, sympathizing with me, even pitying me. Already I am lonely and baffled, still doubting my sanity. . . ."

She sat twisting her hands, and a slow flush crept up the skin of her cheeks as white as magnolia blossoms.

"It is indelicate, perhaps, to tell you what I heard, in gossip, Doren—I shall call you that when we are alone—indelicate for what it may imply, if you wish to keep your soul identity unknown to her . . . but I am sure that Norah and Manson Towers are secretly married."

Doren made no reply, but he writhed as he remembered Norah's smug and proprietory manner, and realized that was because he belonged to her!

This was an unheard of kind of bigamy! Yet how explain why Manson Towers had a bachelor apartment of his own? He did not comment, but his expression must have displayed a kind of baffled and trapped expression.

"You poor boy. I feel just as if you were being fed to a tigress."

Doren resented her pity.

"I may be in Towers' body, but we are still different individualities, Virginia. . . . I wish I had that token—and that the story about the magic power were true."

"After what has happened, you should be able to believe most anything."

She reached for a slim book, opened it at random.

"I bought a little volume on Pythagoras," she explained, "and listen to what a biographer, Porphyry, writing in the Second Century, A. D. had to say:

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'Pythagoras calmed storms for the safe passage of his friends. . . . On the same day he discoursed in two places, many, many leagues apart, at Metapontum and Tauremenium . . . He did strange things with incantations and *magic charms* and magic . . . in Egypt he lived with the priests and learned their magic and wisdom.'

"I became interested enough that I went to the great New York Public Library at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, and there I finally obtained a book I could understand, in a slight measure, about Egyptian hieroglyphics. I found that a fish is an ideograph, representing an idea, and with several letters of the hieroglyphic alphabet"—and here her voice dropped—"the fish meant *a wall.* Behind a wall is always something it guards—this fish talisman guards a secret or a magic power. Or am I becoming too imaginative."

Doren groaned. "I wish it were a mere green-and-gold ornament now hanging from your ivory neck. If it has magic power I wish you had it now, and could make a wish to get us both out of this situation."

"I did, in good time, make proper wishes," she replied coolly, regarding him steadily; "but you can't hurry magic."

LISTENING to her delightful voice, so low and soothing, while his eyes were flattered by her visual loveliness, he reflected there was one kind of beguiling enchantment that was quick enough: Virginia cast a spell over him without half trying. It was the effortlessness with which he felt secure within a magic square with her, in this room, that astonished him. He thought her attractive, warm, vibrant, but that wasn't all: he wanted to have her with him, far from the rest of the world. Such a vast possessive jealousy amazed him. He had never felt like this before and he didn't like it, didn't feel equal to such immense emotions.

Even though he realized, now, that he was involved in a plot that must have sinister relation to his own country, Doren had that little sneaky, cowardly regret that he hadn't taken the easiest way, returned the talisman and accepted Virginia's offer to save him by marriage.

"We could have been away now, on a honeymoon," he said quietly.

A pink color flooded her cheeks.

"I wanted to save you, but a woman can never for long hide an emotion worse than anger or hatred, and that is contempt. A girl can give in to a maternal urge, but the man she saves, if the way is unworthy, grows less and less in stature."

Doren nodded. So that was the way a man dwindled when he took the easy way, hiding behind a woman's skirts. Not so good. Not good at all, as a matter of fact.

He arose reluctantly "I don't know just when I can see you again. This is a miserable fix I'm in. I've thought of something though. If the man apparently Captain Grahame tries to convince you no soul switch took place, let us decide on a password to decide that. I might be able to *get back* and I'd want you to believe me."

She whispered, very low: "I have it. The password to the real Doren Grahame is—Pythagoras."

He nodded, tried to frame in his mind her face and soft delightful smile, as she went with him to the door.

"I feel much better," he told her, "for I don't regret that lost honeymoon too much. That poison of contempt coming to the surface would have spoiled everything."

She nodded seriously. "The world is short of lots of things—but the store of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

honeymoons isn't going to run out."

Then she pushed him out of the door, with a half affectionate shove, and he was alone again, slowly going downstairs.

CHAPTER XVI

The Bodyguard

DOREN waved at a taxi, told the man to drive north to 110th Street. There he paid off, strolled up Eighth Avenue. In a block he spotted several pawn shops. He walked through swinging doors of one of these, smelled the stuffy, moth-ball odor. An old man behind the counter blinked with bright, bird-like eyes.

"I need a small revolver, with a load of cartridges, just for self-protection, but I haven't the story to go with a license. I could go over to Jersey City and get a gun with no questions asked. What do I put on the line for one here?"

"Ever done business here before?"

"No, and I won't again. I have fifty bucks that talks. Or do I go up the street where they may not be particular?"

Two minutes later Doren left the shop. In his back pocket was a snub-nosed automatic. He found the same cab parked at 110th, waiting for a fare, jumped in and gave the office address. Arriving there he paid and tipped the driver, took the elevator upstairs. The private room was empty but the scent of a sultry perfume still lingered in the air.

He would have liked to peer into the filing cabinets to find out something about the business conducted here. Instead he sat behind the polished table, examined his pointed fingernails, didn't care for them. Darn it, he thought, a man is lonely enough in the physical form he has grown up with and become accustomed to; whether handsome or ugly, the identity is natural and you've accepted it—you are somebody with a name tag, a past and a present you know all about. . . .

"Manson, why didn't you tell me you would be out for so long a time?"

The voice was shrill. Norah, posed in the doorway, lifted her upper lip into something that reminded him of a dog snarling.

"Don't get huffy. It doesn't become you."

"Why, you don't sound like yourself, darling."

Her eyes glared while the voice cooed. I'm not going to have any hell-cat riding me, decided Doren. What Towers put up with was one thing, and if the chump ever comes back, okay; but me, I'm different.

"Listen, Norah, before this war the American male, as regards being dominated by the female, was the scorn of the Continent. Now, come off that lion-tamer style, throw your whip away and sit down and act feminine."

She sighed. "I'm sorry, but we have so little time. In some unknown way Don Blatten got priority on planes from Mexico City. He had to lay over in Philadelphia for a time, and he phoned. He knows what we want, and we know what he claims he can deliver. He doesn't trust us. Before he will lead us to the *place* he wants the fifteen thousand in cash."

DOREN nodded. Quickly he connected the unknown Blatten, and his knowledge, with Maldren Baerton—but he might be wrong. . . .

"We just have about time to get to the bank and delve into your safe deposit vault."

So that was it—Towers had the do-re-mi.

"I've lost the key."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Never mind that, I have the duplicate."

"But, Norah, aren't we taking a chance handing over that fifteen grand to Blatten—in advance?"

"We shall have him guarded every minute. I've arranged for that."

"Good. But just how do we know he can locate the *place?*"

She shrugged impatiently. "You seem to forget that Blatten was Baerton's trusted driver; and the financier was too nervous to handle a car himself. The place can't be here in the city; too risky. Blatten, without being trusted as to what it was all about, may have put little things together and arrived at a conclusion. You know the weakness of certain very clever men is that they under-estimate the intelligence of menials."

"What time will Blatten be here?"

"Four o'clock," said Norah, "and the car will be ready down in front of this building. Hurry, we want to get to the bank."

Doren arose and followed her. The bank was several blocks away and they walked. Inside the branch the woman led the way to the right and a safe deposit vault section downstairs. The guard opened the steel door. Another nodded. He went to the files, located a yellow card, nine by twelve inches. He then led the customer to a small cubby hole, closed the door upon him.

Quite familiar with the procedure, Doren glanced at the card. It gave dates when Towers had visited his vault. At the right of the line was his signature, written in a long, sloping script. He imitated it as best he could, and when he left the tiny room and presented it to the guard the latter put it in the files without examination. Recognizing Towers and Norah had been sufficient, save for this formality.

Norah handed over the key to her companion. In two minutes he had a big metal box, carried it back into the cubby hole. Paper money was stacked inside. He counted out fifteen thin stacks marked a thousand each and placed them in his inside pocket. Underneath, there were a few papers and what he recognized as a red passport booklet, but there was no excuse to use up time in an examination.

Coming out, Doren followed the guard into the vault, saw the box returned, his own key used upon it, and returned to him. Norah held out her hand. He grinned at her, slipped the key into his own pocket. The Manson Towers of the past might do tricks. But people change, and he had changed.

Outside the bank Norah said tersely: "You lost one key. Give me that one."

"Remember about the hen-pecked Americans, my love. If I ever copied 'em, I've sworn off."

"Perhaps you don't love me any more?"

She delivered that remark confidently, and he smiled dryly.

"Perhaps not. Your charms come too high when it's at the price of self respect."

"Since when did you compliment yourself on self respect? Why, I found you practically in the gutter. . . ."

"That's the way of a woman, always reminding. Maybe I'd rather be back in the gutter than a kind of tame cat?"

"You mean dead in the gutter. Oh, don't let us quarrel. We are both only obeying orders, and if I seem a bit quicker and more restless than you it is that I'm looking into the future—a wonderful future for both of us."

She took his arm, in that intimate, snuggling sort of way that must have been quite winning in the past.

That future stuff was all right, he thought, but I think that that "both of us" was dragged in. I wonder, is she

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

onto me? Was I just being kidded, because there was no other way, into going to the vault and taking out this dough? If so, I bet I'm figured to go along on this trip—to find the mysterious *place*—the *place* only three men, now dead, knew about; and the magic fish points toward in some manner unknown to me.

Yeah, I'll go along, if she is in the know—and then what? I bet it is in the cards that there shortly won't be a Manson Towers!

Had a good hunch sent him to the pawn shop in search of a weapon? He hoped that the hunch had some protective angles to it.

He squeezed her arm, murmuring words about having been nervous and distraught. Sometimes she was so quick and bright that his masculinity reacted in revolt.

Norah sniffed at that. Doren knew that he hadn't been acting true to Mason Towers' habits or manners, but he couldn't help it. If Norah were onto him, it didn't matter—and if she wasn't, well, it was time she learned that from now on certain well-established customs were going to be changed.

DOREN had no idea whether he was supposed to know, personally, the chunky, blond, middle-aged man who entered the office with a stride that somehow seemed military. His eyes were a gray blue, and a hawk-like nose, twisted a bit to one side as if at one time broken, made him look between a retired pugilist and a bodyguard.

He nodded to Norah, glanced at her companion indifferently. She went through introductions. Neither of the men made a move toward shaking hands.

"I wouldn't go through with this setup, sister, but my boss double-crossed me. Allus I was given the old malarky about being down in the will for ten grand—that is if the big boy died a natural death. Somethin' on the line of the Chinese, who pay doctors just as long as they stay well. Baerton had a fear of being knocked off. Well, no will was found, and a long-nosed ant-eater of a son I never heard about, took over, I got a month's pay and glad to have metcha."

Norah said nothing, but she smiled as in agreement.

"Anyway, that's my song and dance. Give me fifteen grand and I'll lead you to the depot where Baerton hid the stuff. Not heavy enough for gold, sister, or I'd hire a truck myself. He was a mystery man, all right, all right; had one of the best short-wave radio sets made, and he worked on codes. None of my affair. Mebbe the stuff is papers only valuable to him, see; that's why I want my bit in advance."

"You'll get it in advance, Don," said Norah, "but we have to protect ourselves, too."

"You think I'd take a powder?"

"A man out for himself alone may do anything. This is the proposition: We have a car downstairs. We will drive to where ever it is. You'll be handed the money before we arrive—when it is too late for any detour of you or the dough."

"You goin' along, sister?"

"Yes, and drop the 'sister'. Miss Norah Serwin to you."

"Hoity toitey, eh? Okay, you're just another skirt to me; mebbe dolled up a little more, but you're all alike in the dark. Call me Mister Blatten."

"Say, is this the start of a love affair?" said Doren sharply. "Do you accept, Blatten, or don't you?"

"Who else is goin' along?"

"Mr. Towers, here, and two friends of mine," replied Norah.

"One too many—drop one of those friends. I'll take on you and Side-burns

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

here, and one other guy—not two."

"You are not very trusting," ventured Doren.

"I suppose you t r u s t me? If it wasn't that I smelled a smell that isn't healthy about anything secret the boss was up to, I'd handle this myself. But it would be out of my line, I know, and I'd never be able to score. When do we start?"

Norah said: "My two friends go along, Blatten; take it or leave it. You are a trained gunman, a killer for everything from a South American despot to one of those grafting Chinese warlords, and three to one isn't enough odds."

"I see you rate yourself in? What if four to one is too much for me?"

"This is too important for fifteen grand saved, and a dead body to explain," put in Doren, and Norah gazed at him in amazement. "You've guessed, of course, this is big, even if not worth anything if you put hands on the stuff."

"Okay, I guess I can handle myself. I won't drive till we get upstate; I'm tired from all that sky ridin'."

"Let's go," suggested Norah. She smiled as he looked from one to the other.

THE LONG black car, waiting at the curb held two strangers in the back seat. Norah opened the door. Blatten stepped in, pulled down a seat, facing the others, so he would ride backwards. Norah slipped behind the wheel and Doren got in beside her.

Blatten gave terse instructions to head up the river road to Poughkeepsie. Half turned around, listening, Doren glanced at the two impassive, colorless men in the back seat and wondered if he might be looking at the same pair who had been masked at Dr. Leonard's sanitarium.

As the car continued northward, Doren realized there were possibilities in the trip that could mean the end of both Blatten and himself. Whatever the *stuff* might be, it was of such paramount importance no chance would be given to Blatten or himself to tell about it.

He could not know, as yet, whether he was being led into another trap, too, by Norah. She might very well know about the great experiment that would be worth millions to the war leaders of the enemy, even now with a crumbling cause and facing ultimate defeat. What wouldn't they pay to avoid trials, and sure convictions as war criminals? Only one outsider knew. With him out of the way, Towers could be changed back. But why not stick along as Captain Grahame? It was obvious that he knew altogether too much!

There was so much, of course, that he did not know. Just what was the false Doren Grahame who had taken his body doing? Certainly he hadn't succeeded in finding the talisman—or fifteen grand wouldn't be offered to Don Blatten. Whether Dr. Leonard had confided in Norah was one thing. The original Manson Towers had been badly smitten; and whether married to her or not, his infatuation wouldn't be gone. In a kind of cock-eyed self-protection against a fake Manson Towers, he would surely tell the girl beside him what it was all about.

Doren couldn't think of anything in his own favor. Even the gun in his back pocket wasn't so very reassuring, considering the odds. Whether Norah packed a tiny automatic in her handbag was a question, but she had herself down when she spoke of four to one. Perhaps a fellow like Blatten had taken so many chances he had become steel-nerved.

Of course, there was an alternative that Doren somewhat discounted, but it

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was worth considering. If Blatten knew the *place*, wouldn't the knowledge be worth more than fifteen grand to him? If he knew, how had Maldern Baerton been stupid enough to lack sufficient caution, by allowing an aid, at most a car driver and bodyguard, to edge in on such a secret? A financier such as Baerton had proved himself to be, might be given credit for more defensive wariness.

Did Norah merely figure Blatten should be removed, either way? Was this to be another version of a one way ride?

CHAPTER XVII

Call It Self Defense

ALMOST automatically Doren took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, selected one, held it for Norah's lips; then he lighted and shielded a cupped match and she inhaled deeply, still with her hands upon the wheel. The glass windows were down and strands of her hair blew against his face and he thrilled at the spicy fragrance of a perfume new to him.

"You smell purdy," he said, grinning.

"That's called 'Passion In Spring', my love, and is supposed to make the hesitant male come hither."

"I doubt if you ever found many hesitant."

"Ah, more in your old vein, darling! I've felt you might be falling for the virginal charms of Virginia, or is that a bad jest? Quite foolish. She liked that American, Captain Grahame—remember? Your blasé blood responded to her freshness, but you aren't the type, Manson."

She spoke lightly, with a hint of sarcasm in the tone. Did she, he wondered, take him at face value? He doubted it. He thought it impossible that the real Manson now occupying his body, had failed to contact her.

Oddly, though, he had a feeling that, even if aware, she found a thrill in making a peculiar captive to her charms—knowing that the physical had an involuntary tendency to follow certain set customs. Manson, he knew, must have like to kiss her, caress her. . . . If she knew all she yet had the vanity to wish to compel *him* to want her.

Knowing the chances were that he was being led into a death trap, if Blatten could deliver, Doren found his own left hand closing about the right hand of Norah's, and a little sensuous shiver went through him like an electric current. Her eyes, faunlike, gave him a side glance between half-closed lids, as if to say: 'you couldn't help doing that, could you?' She snuggled a bit toward him but her attention never left the wheel nor the road. He felt the pressure of her thigh for an instant, and then the titillation was removed as she withdrew several inches with a parody of modesty.

As the car sped along at a moderate speed Blatten gave directions and finally told Norah to head toward Poughkeepsie.

"We shall be there in time for dinner. We can get a good meal at the Nelson House. No harm in saying the spot is in Dutchess County; that covers a lot of territory."

"I don't know the way," said Norah. So Blatten said he would continue directing; but sitting backward made that difficult. So one of the two silent dummies, as Doren thought of them, changed seats with him.

Withdrawing his hand, pleased to find the current lessening, Doren thought about the little bungalow he owned on Dawson Lake, ten miles or more from Pleasant Valley, in the county. On that body of water, and Parker Lake, not so

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

far away, he had vacationed and fished and hunted until he knew that section of the township very well. His uncle had been up several times; the country air and sunshine had made that hard machine act somewhat human.

HOW LONG ago that seemed. He had read a fanciful tale once, about reincarnation and how certain adepts, trained through the centuries, could actually remember former existences. Looking back upon his life as Doren Grahame—now that he was Manson Towers—he felt as if he were thinking of a past life cut off in its prime.

That the body of Doren Grahame was still alive made the sensation and reaction quite a bit different; but the idea of time was drawn out tremendously, as it is said to be stretched in a hashish dream. How many hours since the experiment succeeded? That event seemed to fade into the past, though he knew this was only because of freakish facts that made each nervous minute appear longer.

Ever loomed the chance of letting fear overcome him, and that he break into a paroxysm of terror. It wasn't: shall I be killed? Every man, particularly one with his experiences as a pilot, could face that. It was: shall I ever get back to my own body again? Possess everything I consider *me?* Will something happen to imprison me *from now on* in a physical shell I despise?

There was another angle—the fact that he was certain he was in the middle of a plot against his country; and yet, unless he had some proof, the authorities would be counted upon to deem him insane. That was what he was up against.

Doren threw his cigarette out upon the highway. You are worrying a lot, in advance, he told himself. Perhaps after tonight your worries and everything else will be over. Meantime, take things as they come.

NORAH, following directions, turned off the river road near Poughkeepsie, and the car was parked near the Nelson House. Doren folowed her inside the old-fashioned hotel, the three other men trailing behind; they found a table in the dining room and all echoed Blatten's order of a dry Martini. Everyone was tired from the trip. Even the impassive, unintroduced guards had become a bit tense.

It might have been Doren's imagination, but he thought that Blatten dragged out the meal by ordering special food, then dallying with it. He insisted upon coffee and brandy, then settled in his seat with a long cigar.

Outside, it had become dark. Well, whether Blatten was on the level or not, he wouldn't start anything until the fifteen grand was handed over.

Doren called for the check. He pulled out a wad of bills. Norah gave him a quick, suspicious glance. Maybe, he thought, I'm supposed to be at the end of a leash, on an allowance? He tipped liberally, then called the waiter back and bought cigarettes and cigars. He lighted what passed for a havana.

"I never saw you smoke a cigar before," murmured Norah.

So, that was a mistake—unless she was just easing him along.

"There's lots you haven't seen, sweetheart. When Mr. Blatten is ready we shall move along."

"I'm guide of this party," said that gentleman. "We have quite a drive and I think, after it, we will hole up over night. What with plane and car travel I'm tired. What about you, cool and unapproachable?"

He grinned at Norah.

"You look more natural in your

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

butler's uniform, big boy. You have 'servants' entrance' written all over your pan, anyway."

Blatten crimsoned to the eyes. No one laughted. Chairs were pushed back. Norah swung ahead with that model's sway of hers, and the men followed in single file. Back in the car, in the same positions, Blatten directed the driver northward along the main highway. In less than a hour he told her to turn left to Salt Point, and then left again. Doren thrilled a little; they were going directly into the country with which he was familiar. Of course that meant nothing, really, since there were miles of back roads and side roads no one save road gangs knew existed.

The moon went behind a cloud. The night became darker. The headlights shot ahead into a kind of fog and mist. Here and there, back from the road, could be seen twinkling farm lights; again the car sped, with darkness on either side, as in a tunnel.

Blatten guiding, the car sped by several hamlets, kept directly onward; instead of turning toward Dawson Lake it kept going along a highway that would lead by Parker Lake.

"Stop the car," ordered Blatten suddenly.

Norah obeyed.

"No, I ain't a sap; we aren't there yet, but near enough. I want that fifteen grand in my pocket. These two deaf mutes can watch me."

"Very well," said Norah. "Pass him the money, Manson. Roger, you and Bert be ready for any move."

Doren passed over the sheaf of bills. Blatten took a small flash from his pocket, balanced it upon his knee, counted the money, then placed it in an inside pocket.

"Okay," he said, "keep on going. My boss owned a little bungalow on Parker Lake, under the monicker of Tim Smith. We are heading there. A circular road reaches around the Lake. Turn right when I give the word."

VERY SOON a long body of water loomed at the right, and Blatten said this was the road. Norah turned and, at a slower speed, the car wormed its way between trees that made something of a canopy. The lake was possibly a mile long. The road turned at the end and then Blatten said to go uphill by what appeared to be nothing more than an unused cattle path, but there was room enough for a car.

"Over at the left," he said suddenly.

A plateau about two hundred foot square had been cut into a hill. In the middle stood a bungalow, with a wing, high on a cement foundation. It loomed bleak and desolate, paint peeling from the siding.

"Not much of a hangout for a multi-millionaire, eh?" said Blatten, "but there was a reason for it. Very fine stone cellar underneath."

"You get out first," ordered Norah, "and no monkey business. That fifteen grand is nut money, the way things are, and you haven't a gambler's chance. . . ."

"I'm not trying to get away with anything. Keep your chemise on, and I'll lead the way indoors."

His voice sounded tense, even if nervousness was hidden by a flippant manner. He slowly walked from the car. Bert or Rogers—Doren didn't know which was which—held an electric torch on him. Blatten ascended a flight of front stone steps, took keys from his pocket, selected one. He stepped inside. After the others had entered he slammed the door. Norah felt the knob.

"Snap lock," she said, "Anything more to unlock."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Keep the keys for the minute," Blatten said carelessly.

He pressed a switch and the main room was flooded with light. It was the usual more or less comfortable lodge layout, with a fireplace and imitation cross beams.

"At the back is the kitchen and a bathroom. To the right, in the wing, you'll find two bedrooms. You won't be interested in flopping quite yet. You wanta see what I'm giving for the fifteen grand. Well, follow me."

Blatten walked back to the kitchen. He crossed to the right hand corner, stooped and pulled up a hook that was imbedded a little circle of the linoleum. Quickly he pulled up a trap door, leading to a cellar, and, as quickly, jumped in and the trap door banged down on top of him.

Dorren leaped to the trap. He grabbed at the hook, pulled. The door had been locked from within.

Norah was blazing. She rushed to the kitchen door. The same key Blatten had used at the front door didn't open it. But Bert had a window open. He was kicking out a wire screen. Then he was through, dropping down to the ground, a full eight foot drop. Rogers was out a side window without word or sound.

"He is down in the cellar," said Doren, "or is there another exit?"

"We are all fools!" Norah cried. "He was too quick for us. There's an exit from that cellar. Either direct, or to and out from under the wing. Don't you see—the cellar is built *on* the ground instead of under it."

"But could Blatten have brought us to the right place—and still be afraid we'd doublecross him? Could the stuff be down there?"

"I doubt it. We shall see. Isn't that an ax over in the corner by the sink?"

Doren walked over, picked it up. It felt good in his hands. Suddenly the silence was broken by a sharp shot.

Norah gasped. "That must be Blatten. Not my men. They have silencers on their guns. Lay down that ax. We can go around the front way and see how he made that surprise getaway."

All at once she was smiling. That didn't look good to Doren. She couldn't be worrying about Bert or Rogers, only pleased that they were within firing distance of Blatten.

NORAH OPENED the front door. He followed her, noting that the moon was now flooding the countryside with silver radiance. In the distance the lake sparkled but not a light showed anywhere. A gravel path, very narrow, went around the bungalow. At the back of the wing was an open door, Doren lighted a match, stepped inside, found a long chain that led to an electric light bulb, pulled it. The room, on ground level, was empty except for a huge pile of coal. At the left was another door, ajar. Norah stepped through into the cellar under the main building, found another light.

A stairway led up to the kitchen, via the trap door, which was closed by a latch. They saw an electric pump, a coal furnace, a heap of dusty bottles.

Doren unlatched the trap, pushed it up, went through, held it open for Norah. She sighed as they re-entered the main lodge room.

"I wasn't sure, though I suspected he'd play us for suckers."

"That dive into the cellar through the trap door was quick and sudden. Your two dummies were caught off guard."

"Perhaps."

"But why were you suspicious?"

"Two reasons," she said. "Baerton would be unlikely to let a servant know

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of his secret movements on a matter of international importance. And if Blatten did know why, fifteen grand would be chicken feed. However, I took a chance."

"Now what?"

Norah walked to a low couch and patted a place invitingly beside her. A little fearful, Doren sat down.

"It is time for us to get down to cases, darling. Oh, don't look frightened, I'm not a man-eater. This will be an offer that should have an all around appeal to you. You are too old and experienced to wonder what the catch is when a woman offers herself. So I shall be frank—I am selfish and I want you to be selfish, too. I don't know whether you have been playing a theatrical kind of act, yourself, figuring that you were deceiving me. I knew all along—as soon as you escaped from Dr. Leonard's—what had taken place. But what you don't know is that I'm much more attracted to you than to the one and original Manson Towers.

"It must be the perverse in me. Manson was my slave. I've been amused to see how you have unconsciously copied his mannerisms. I appealed to him strongly, physically, before I dominated his mind. That appeal still holds, doesn't it?"

She drew close to him. Doren unconsciously put his arm around her. He was kissing her soft warm lips; and his body—this new body he inhabited—wanted her above all else with a keen, aching desire.

"You could be my master," she said softly, pushing him back, and she smiled enigmatically. "Now remember, I can control the Manson who now occupies your person. I offer you a partnership. Bring the fish ornament to me and we will share on two things: Baerton's secret, worth millions, and also on the great invention—the details of which can be sent to Germany, where it would be of the utmost value—and, in return, diamonds and jewels and art treasures will be part of the loot. There can be another reward, to you. I promise that you can be changed back to your former self. . . . Now, what could be more fair?"

Doren nodded. He had an instinct to deceive her, prostitute the body into which he had been changed, in an effort to learn more; but then there came to him a sudden repugnance, as if he were about to be plunged into mire.

Further, even if he could trust her, it wasn't any feeling of possible criminal action that was a drawback; it was the fact that he would be a traitor to his country.

NORAH moved further down the couch. Her face was flushed a bit, and she breathed heavily.

"Think quickly, darling. Even as we wait another kind of offer may be forming. The occasion for fencing is over. Nothing has gone right. It may be that pressure must be exerted, even cruel pressure. Why don't you accept the easiest way?"

Doren pleaded for a little time—while he wondered if it wouldn't be a good idea to flee from the bungalow, out into the darkness, before those two muscle-men returned? No one knew he owned a little hunting lodge on the lake not more than a mile away. It might be difficult, but by the light of the moon, and his hunting memory of roads and hills, he could find his way there—break in a window. . . .

Just then the front door opened. One of the men entered. His face was scratched until the blood had come. His tongue moistened dry lips. He spoke to Norah in a language Doren didn't understand.

Then the fellow walked quietly over

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the couch. He tried to smile. It was more like a grimace. He felt in his right coat pocket, as if reaching for a pack of cigarettes. He drew out something black, swung it back over his shoulder. Doren put an arm up before his face. The blackjack caught him at the base of the brain.

As he drifted into unconsciousness he thought he heard Norah, speaking in English.

"Too bad. I hope you didn't hit him too hard. You have the other body. Then lug it in."

How there could have been this pause of hearing, before the darkness, was strange; it was as if there was a delayed action in the knockout before it reached the brain.

CHAPTER XVIII

After Murder

DOREN was aware that he was talking, answering questions; but the words he heard, and his own replies, seemed somewhat light-headed and all far away and separated from reality.

Virginia's name was mentioned, and he must have become poetic in speaking of her youth and beauty in a manner that would have made him flush with embarrassment if quite awake.

He was asked about Norah, and he had to admit her magnetic attraction, and how difficult it was even to desire to resist it.

Then the talisman was spoken of, only it was called the glass fish. Perhaps, even in his careless, undefensive feeling, Doren had an unconscious tendency to cover up. He spoke of the talisman as a wonderful ancient charm with magical powers. It might even be said the power had been proved. How? . . . He remembered that he only shook his head in silence. . . . Where was the talisman now? . . .

"I do not know I do not know."

He repeated the words many times, as if to throw off further questioning.

"If you do not know, who does keep the secret of where it is hidden?"

"Who keeps the secret?" . .

He must not mention Tompkins, that was dangerous.

So he went back to: "I do not know. I do not know."*

Perhaps the influence of the drugs was wearing off, or the questioner grew tired and allowed him to lapse into the real slumber that often followed; but that was all that Doren remembered when he awoke, and then very vaguely, not being able to decide whether it had been a dream or not.

He was lying on the floor of a room that was strange to him. As he struggled to sit up he felt a terrible pain at the base of his skull, and his forehead ached as if an iron band were drawn about it. The only light was from a bright electric bulb, unshaded. Doren blinked and his tongue touched dry lips. He needed a drink of water.

Then he remembered. One of the dummies had blackjacked him. Where was he now? He lifted himself on his elbow and then he saw a side view of shoes—and the shoes were attached to a huddled body!

Just then he heard the sound of a motor outside. A door slammed, and then Norah was bending over him, her

* It is quite possible that Doren had been placed in a quasi-dream state by being given such drugs as sodium petothal and scopolamine, now used by the Army Medical Corps in a technique described as "narcosynthesis," to cause patients to talk freely and so release inhibitions that cause nervous complexes.

The ancient Greeks called such a release, or confession, karthordis.

However, as in a hypnotic state a man will not do anything that offends his normal state, so here there are certain things that would not be revealed.—ED.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eyes wild, her breath hot upon his face.

"I threw the snap-lock but I can't hold the officers I brought from Poughkeepsie. That's Blatten there, dead. I'll plead self defense if you will deliver the glass fish to me. Or I'll turn you in for murder. Quick, decide!"

He mumbled. "I'll do anything, swear anything."

"On your honor as an officer and a gentleman."

"On my honor as an officer and a gentleman. I must get a little time . . ."

"Okay," she snapped, and was up and out.

DOREN had noticed her blouse had been torn, then fixed with big safety pins. Her hair was wild and there was a long scratch down the side of her right cheek.

Lying there, blinking, not fully conscious as yet, Doren realized his resistance had been at low ebb. Norah rushed back. Behind her were several men. Doren recognized the uniform of the state police. She pulled one fellow in civilian clothes by the arm, pointed to the body outstretched beyond Doren.

"There he lies—Don Blatten. As I told you, Sheriff, I'm the wife of Manson Towers. We were married at City Hall, in New York, three months ago. We came up here with Don on a little ride. We were to stay overnight and return in the morning. Well, we had no drinks; but suddenly Blatten went wild. He pulled me in here, tried to attack me. My husband came to my defense. Blatten clubbed him with the butt of his revolver, knocked him senseless. I grappled with Don, trying to get the revolver away from him; the man was insane. In the struggle, somehow, the revolver was discharged—I don't know whether one or two times. He fell to the floor . . .

"I was in a panic! I knew Don needed medical help, if alive; my husband, too. I ran out to the car and to the nearest house and telephoned. Then I waited for you to come along and pick me up."

Someone went over and examined Blatten, said very dryly: "Dead as a mackerel. Any time between an hour and two hours."

"An hour would make it about right," said the sheriff mildly. "Find the gun?"

"Yes," said a state trooper, "but we will first examine it for finger prints. There it is, by his body."

Doren felt himself being lifted to his feet. He was aided into a chair. He groaned, and his hand went to the back of his head and felt the lump there. The doctor examined him, whistled.

"You are lucky, Mr. Towers. He might have broken your spine with that blow. Here, take a drink of whiskey. Best thing there is for the after effects of a knockout like the one he landed on you."

Doren took the bottle gratefully, gulped a big drink and handed it back with thanks.

"There is a bit of flesh and blood on the right forefinger," exclaimed the sheriff as he examined the dead man.

Thought Doren: they think of everything. The screens that had been kicked through were gone. The room was a shambles; and Norah looked like a melodramatic picture of outraged womanhood. The manner in which she had torn the silk blouse so that, even though pinned together, a white shoulder was displayed through split seams, told of how she had fought to save her honor after her gallant husband had gone down. . . .

What would her story have been if he hadn't made that promise?

She was bright and quick as an impromptu liar. Perhaps a jealous quarrel

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

. . . and then he had shot Don Blatten.

Of course, she had taken the muscle-men away toward Poughkeepsie. Never fear about them; they'd find their way and turn up like bad pennies.

THE sheriff turned to Doren.

"You've had a bad time of it. Do you feel able to talk?"

Doren shook his head to throw off the fogginess that clung so insistently.

"It can be explained only by insanity. Don Blatten was attracted to my wife. I fought for her and she fought back in self defense. That the revolver exploded and killed him was an accident."

"Did he own this bungalow?"

"I don't think so. I believe he intended to rent it from a friend this summer. I think it belonged to a man named Tim Smith. Blatten had the keys."

"Yes," said a state trooper. "Too, he was wearing a shoulder holster, and the gun fits into it nicely."

Norah sank on to the bed. Now, face in hands, she was giving a good imitation of a refined woman having a fit of hysteria. Through her fingers he could see lovely, haunted eyes, with real tears. It seemed she was giving a very good performance, and even this tough audience was impressed.

The sheriff was being apologetic. They would be obliged to go to Poughkeepsie and, in the morning, have a brief session in front of Judge Bartly. When the cars got to town he would wake up a lawyer, Tom Morris, and release them to him. It was, of course, a clear case of self defense.

Now, if Mrs. Towers and her husband were agreeable, a state trooper would drive their car down to Poughkeepsie. He would take the body in his own machine, and follow.

"Oh, Sheriff, I feel terrible," cried Norah." I see that horrible face bending toward me, the hands reaching, clutching . . . my husband unconscious on the floor. I shall never sleep a wink tonight—never a wink; I know it."

An hour and a half later Tom Morris left them at a small hotel. The proceedings next morning would be nothing except a formality, perhaps put off until afternoon for certain details to be checked from New York: the marriage, the car, and so on.

Doren asked for a big room and bath. A bell boy took them up two flights of stairs. He opened the door and was asked to bring ice water.

Before he returned Doren had his coat and shirt off and was eyeing a couch by the window. He needed ice water. Norah already had it—in her veins.

However long he might remain in the form of Manson Towers, he was safe from her tawdry charms. That much, at any rate, the murder of Don Blatten had accomplished.

Doren drank two glasses of water. Then he asked Norah if she wanted one, and when she nodded, all white and silk, he gave it into her hand with a cold, idle glance.

"I'll take the couch, sister. I need rest. If that muscle-man had hit me a bit harder I'd be alone in the morgue."

"Oh, Manson. . . ."

"You've done enough acting for tonight. Save it."

Doren got himself comfortable, threw himself on the cot, closed his eyes and went to sleep. Sulkily, the woman crawled into the big double bed all herself—to her mind, insultingly ignored.

WHAT time it was when he awakened, Doren didn't know. He gathered his things together, fled to the bathroom with scarcely a glance toward

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where Norah was still sleeping. The heat of very hot water took some of the kink from his neck, and he was glad to see that the swelling had somewhat died down. After bathing and dressing he started to sing in a voice that was far from pleasing.

Norah was up and dressed. She was crisp and fresh. With a hard flatness she said she had telephoned for breakfast to be sent up.

"I know your tastes, dear hubbie."

"Stop that lip-curling or it will become a habit. Is the door locked? Then we have time for a little talk. I'm going to come through as I promised, but I didn't have time last night to put a little catch in the contract. I won't deliver until I am changed back into my former self. Oh, I know I won't have a chance given me for a double cross; a dead Doren Grahame would be worse off than a live Manson Towers. I know you are ruthless, as well as the rest."

She laughed. "Very well. You might be surprised. Manson Towers liked himself better as himself than as a bird with a bum left wing. He is drinking too much because of your habits, and your man, Tompkins, is a suspicious pest. Your uncle wants him to go to work. He is continually being spoken to by people you know, but whom he doesn't know. He misses me and he is jealous of you; thinks I may transfer my affections from one Manson to another Manson."

"He needn't worry about that last, far as I'm concerned," said Doren dryly." You are dynamite in disguise. He can have all of you. Another thing: I want forty-eight hours without shadowing. I won't try to run away. I want back in my own body, and you want the talisman."

"I think all that can be arranged. Guess they'll be looking up our marriage, the office, and my apartment. I'm glad to say the latter has a few masculine touches—slippers and a robe and so on."

He would have liked to know just why the two lived in separate apartments, but he let that pass. Perhaps she didn't know he had located Towers' rooms, much else about the new lock and key.

Breakfast came up and then Norah sent him out to buy her a new blouse and a pair of stockings. No doubt the muscle-men were still about . . . or she had no fear of his trying to run away.

Doren walked downstairs, out into the bright sunlight. He found a store for women, made his purchases with an effort at dignity, trying not to be overwhelmed by the oppressive evidences of overwhelming femininity.

He stopped at a cigar store, purchased a havana, smoked it slowly.

There had been a tiny buzzing in his mind, a hint that he was on the verge of finding a clue—that the means had been given him somehow, could he only remember. . . . Perhaps the arrow, pointing, had been unintentional, but there had been something. . . .

Suddenly Doren remembered. The clue had come during the first talk he had with Norah.

He had been speaking: "At a glance the token has no value, for itself."

"No, it is in itself."

Those had been her words, certainly, and whether she meant exactly what she had said was very unlikely, considering that she had been told of the exchange of souls.

But the words opened up a point so strikingly *simple* that neither Tompkins nor himself had ever thought of it. To be sure, the talisman had been examined by a jeweler with his magnifying glass for any marks that might be a code or secret writing, and none

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had been found.

Both men had taken for granted the fish, green with gold fleaming through, was all one piece. *No, it is in itself!* Couldn't the secret be contained *inside* the fish, and there exist a way to separate the two sides and look *in itself?*

Was this grasping at straws? Doren didn't know. Anyway, it was a hope in the midst of total darkness—something to reach for. Consider: The three men were dead who had known the secret. *If* the message did chance to be contained there, didn't he possess a chance to do a dazzling bit of outwitting?

With evidence, he would no longer be alone, he could go to the F.B.I.—no longer a wild man with a crazy nightmare tale, but one with a story that could be confirmed by facts.

Then the authorities would listen to him as he unfolded the monstrous invention through which Hitler and his war-lord criminals might escape from doom. What he might accomplish for his country, was overwhelming in its implications—granting that he could overcome a few ifs.

CHAPTER XIX

The Hostage

ONE if loomed large. Doren didn't know where the talisman was at present. Tompkins might, or might not, tell him. There was no denying that it had been wise not to share the secret with him; through hynotism or drugs he might well have disclosed the secret.

Under ordinary circumstances his conscience might have bothered him because of the sworn promise. Now he told himself that an oath under threat wasn't binding. It gave him, in any case, forty-eight hours.

To be sure, he had admitted he could place his hands on the charm. Once they had it, his soul would be quickly dispatched into the darkness of eternity, unless he had help. This secret was important, but not so important as the invention. If the plotters he faced found he would not make the deal, perhaps both Tompkins and himself would be quickly liquidated. He knew how little murder meant to these men.

Doren realized miserably that he had been solely on the defensive. He must gather the thread of events in his own counter-attack. The dream of success all at once became deflated. He passed the tall mirror of a showcase window, saw reflected, for an instant, a perplexed and dubious-looking creature with sideburns and a complete false face that couldn't be pulled off. Like most men, Doren had always taken his own appearance for granted. Now that his form and face had been stolen from him, he grieved at his loss.

Slowly he walked toward the hotel with his parcel, went upstairs and opened the door without knocking.

Norah was fixing her hair before the bureau mirror. Doren placed the bundle on the chair.

"This was my first shopping trip for a feminine customer. I remembered the sizes. Hope I did all right," he explained.

She tried on the new blouse, heedless of him as if he really were a husband of whom she was sufficiently tired to ignore. Then she kicked off her slippers, pulled off tan stockings with runs, tried on the new ones, pulled down her girdle, affixed the supporters. These intimate little touches, with flashes of flesh, thrilled him as much as if she had been a porcelain figure in a beauty parlor display.

While she finished arranging her hair, Doren picked up her handbag from a chair and opened it. The scent

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of powder and perfume was violent. There were feminine fripperies, but the fifteen grand was missing.

"You idiot. My bag was the first thing they examined."

She touched the front of her blouse, and he bowed.

"The dough is where it belongs, then; nearest your heart."

"What do you know about my heart?" she asked, and her upper lip curled in that animal way he had grown to dislike. "A clinging vine is your type; a kind of purring kitten."

"I'm not a wild-cat tamer," he admitted." But hadn't we better get along to the lawyer's office?"

THE office of the lawyer was over near the Nelson House. The counselor had made an appointment for a visit to Judge Bartly's chambers at eleven-thirty.

"The sheriff's office and the local State Police agree yours was a clear case of self-defense," said Mr. Morris. Your marriage will be checked, the car's ownership, and whether your description matches that given at your business address. Nothing is known, I find, on the owner of the bungalow, save that taxes have been regularly paid by mail, with cash. There were no identifying papers on the dead man."

Norah kept back what she had to say until they came before Judge Bartly. She and Doren returned to him at two o'clock and were freed in the custody of their counsel until the evidence was checked. They were released finally, and by three o'clock the two of them were pulling out for New York, with Norah at the wheel.

A few miles below Poughkeepsie, Norah stopped the car at the side of the highway. She opened her handbag and applied a powder base to the long scratch on her cheek. Over it went a coating of rouge.

"That scratch was genius," commented Doren with reluctant admiration. "When Blatten's dead fingernail was used to make it—with your flesh and blood in it for evidence."

"Yes, a nice touch. You undervalue me, my dear, because you consider only my obvious physical charms. Other women are quite as pretty as I am and try to do as much about it, but I have a brain. Thus I have a small fortune and shall have a great one. I wish——"

"Just what do you wish?"

"I wish you were not an old-fashioned fool, darling, led by the nose by words—words such as democracy, the flag, my country, free and equal, freedom—catch phrases all scattered by those who hold power. If you have power you rule those doped by the catch phrases. After this war, what do you think will happen? Why, the planning for the *third World War*. You start? Wasn't the first one a war to end all wars? Did it ever occur to you that a certain great country is already looking ahead toward a war in which basic mistakes will not be repeated?"

"But our enemies will not be given such a chance."

"Indeed! And in peace time will the great armament powers not sell to all who may buy? Has business any nationality? After the parades have gone by and the bands die down, won't it be business as usual—and any buyer is an excellent one who has cash to pay?"

"I hope that won't be so," said Doren a bit sadly.

"Don't you realize that what the Enemy Custodian has seized is a drop in the bucket? Oh, why talk to you!"

She started the car, as if annoyed with herself for talking to a dim-wit.

BUT what she had said had given Doren an idea—an idea that he had

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hitherto never formulated. If Baerton had a secret store of anything it would not be money. It might well be, however, something that the United States government had every right to confiscate. Otherwise, why all the care, the confiding of the hiding place limited to three men only? The one on this side had died first. The talisman was a courier. Then the two abroad had been killed. Now he had promised to turn over the charm in two days.

No, he would destroy it first. But better, use it in some manner as a bait to trap the plotters. He sank back in his seat, oppressed by futility and frustration. Why, he hadn't even shown enough wit to reply adequately to a cynicism as old and as rotten as the Roman Empire before it fell!

He didn't even know where to find the talisman. At any minute the fake Doren might lay hands upon it. Perhaps Norah knew about its recovery and was only gaining time by deceiving him. Indeed, it could be considered that Don Blatten had been decoyed up to the country, merely to get him out of the way. But no; in that case why was *he* allowed to come back riding at Norah's side? Had the real Manson Towers been promised a return into his own body?

It was better to think the talisman was not yet found and he was depended upon to obtain and deliver it.

Just why? Eyes half closed, Doren wondered. Norah was brilliant, if corrupt. She would realize a word of honor given under such circumstances was not binding. It wouldn't bind a man to be a traitor to his own country.

She must have another more potent means of persuasion. Just what could it be?

Of one thing he was quite certain. He wouldn't be allowed at liberty with nothing stronger than that promise in her hands—a promise given by a man befuddled by drugs, a knockout blow, and a threat of being framed for a murder. Give her credit for better judgment and a keener turning of thumb screws than that. . . . Again, for the hundredth time, he longed to be on the giving instead of the taking end.

Norah drove on in silence, her eyes on the highway. Just north of White Plains she slowed down. Two men stepped out near a closed gasoline station. Bert and Rogers, so alike in impassive silence and a calculated air of stupidity. The car was stopped, the back door opened. One man followed the other in, without greeting or remark.

"So you boys are back," said Doren, stating the obvious. "I'd like my pistol, if one of you has it."

Norah laughed, the sound hard and tinkling.

You don't need a gun. You might hurt someone."

"I see. And what will stop me dropping in and buying another in New York?"

"My friend, while you were shopping for me I did some long distance telephoning. You don't really seem to care what happens to you, I grant you that; but perhaps you will care when I tell you that Virginia Borzia is a hostage for your keeping your promise. Now, there will be no threats. We are not playing for candy. Be good, or you won't see her again."

DOREN felt his eyes grow hot as the blood rushed to his cheeks.

He might have known! Yes, he might have known.

The promise had been asked only to smooth away the murder. Norah had kept until the proper time the real means she possessed of coercion.

To put such a responsibility upon

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him was hideous, a monstrous threat. Go to the police with a yarn like that and they'd send him to the psychopathic observation ward in Bellevue Hospital.

Doren never had struck a woman; just now it would have been a pleasure to smash her mouth with his clenched fist. How foolish the impulse, how pitiful the result. He must smash the machine she represented if anything were to be accomplished. No lesser gesture would do.

He sat beside her, trying to relax, rolling, as it were, with the blow.

"It is nice," she cooed," that you have a chivalrous spirit. We master one's count on such weakness. There is—there *must* be—another chance for us."

By an effort he kept silent. What good to taunt her that Hitler's fortress of Europe was fast crumbling from the great invasion shocks. He realized that *she was looking ahead, beyond this war.*

The miles swept by. It was growing dark by the time the car reached Yonkers. Norah turned eastward at 125th Street and drove down Central Park West. She stopped the machine at the corner of the street where Virginia Borzia lived.

"You will be wanting to get out here, my love. Remember, there is a time limit — you have only forty-eight hours."

Her eyes mocked him and he hated the dancing devils of derision mirrored in them.

"I won't forget," he returned grimly, and stepped to the street.

CHAPTER XX

The First Blow

DOREN pushed the button under Virginia's mailbox in the hallway of the brown-stone front. There was no response. He found a button under SUPT. and rang it. A pleasant, middle-aged woman came around from the basement.

"You wish to see the apartment we've advertised for rent, sir?"

He shook his head, hesitated, then relied on a kind of boldness.

"I don't want to call in the police, lady. I haven't proof, for one thing; but Miss Borzia is a friend of mine. Once we were nearly married. I think she has been—well—lured away, spirited away, and I wonder if I can have your help?"

The mention of the police flustered her, as he had intended.

"All I desire is to enter her apartment with you and learn if any clue has been left behind."

"I don't quite understand."

"Neither do I, but Miss Borzia is very quick and adroit; those who were in the Underground in Europe learned to be. She might have left a subtle message."

"You mean a message in disappearing ink, or anything like that?"

"No, nothing you read about in spy stories. She would be under observation. But please get your keys and let's go upstairs."

She pulled a bunch of keys from her apron pocket. Doren led the way. He followed her upstairs and into Virginia's apartment. Everything was neatly in place. There was no sign of a struggle. He went to a little desk and found it locked. The waste-paper basket was empty. Aside from a number of cigarette butts thrown into the fire-place, the living room might as well be ready for a new tenant.

Doren walked into the bedroom. The bed was made. In the clothes closet hung dresses. But the dressing table was bare of the usual toilet and make-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up stuff, and he couldn't find a bag or suitcase anywhere.

Then he got down on hands and knees and looked under the bed. At first glance he saw a number of low shoes and sandals, in confusion, unlike the marked neatness displayed everywhere. Then he whistled. The footwear had not been thrown together. It seemed formed into a kind of rough, alphabetical design:

"S and A and N," he murmured, then pushed the seven pairs of shoes and sandals together in a heap.

"What did you say?" asked the housekeeper.

"Nothing. . . . I'm afraid there is nothing to go on. I'm sorry, it all seemed so mysterious. Perhaps Miss Borzia will be back."

THE first thing to do, of course, was to get in touch with Tompkins. With the woman's permission he used the telephone, but no answer came at his former home.

Doren shook his head and took his leave, low in spirit. Out on the pavement he looked up and down the street. People were coming and going but he knew that Virginia was not among them.

It was dinner time, yet he was not hungry. But, upon reaching 8th Avenue, he stopped in at a lunch room for a light meal. Where could he go to be believed—and to get help? Who would possibly listen to him long enough to realize he wasn't insane? Tompkins had listened—but one of his kind was hard to come upon. He could, to be sure, go to his uncle, Wharton Grahame. He must have noticed a strangeness in his nephew since the change. Doren knew details running way back in the family history. Would Wharton be attentive until convinced?

Doren hardly knew what his uncle could do to aid, if he believed him. Wealth, however, means power. Authorities would listen to a man of Wharton's standing because the possession of riches somehow presupposes brains and steadiness. This desperate aloneness made him decide to make a try with his cold, frosty relative.

He took a taxi and was driven to a fashionable little house on Sutton Square, near the East River.

He paid the driver and went up the outer steps, pleased to see the windows were all lighted. Just then the door opened and the man who now called himself Doren Grahame, still in the uniform of a flying officer, came down the few steps.

Instantly he caught sight of the real Grahame and his face flushed with anger. "Damn all this counterfeit business," he growled.

"I agree with you, Towers. You are a disgrace to that uniform."

"A disgrace, am I? And what are you doing running around with Norah? Oh, I know all about it; you've been up in the country with her, staying slyly at a hotel, making her believe . . ."

"Have you forgotten she knows everything?"

"I mean making her believe that you are crazy about her—and having her like it."

"She can get used to anybody," said Doren brutally.

Towers' cheeks flamed at the remark, and he swung wildly at Doren. Doren avoided the blow and hit him. More by chance than skill the blow reached

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the point of the other's jaw. Towers went down slowly, as if in a daze, and Doren blew on the fist, chuckled with satisfaction. This was the first time he had ever heard of a man knocking himself out and liking it!

He watched the other gasp back to consciousness, get up, brush himself off, shake his head, throw a nasty look at his enemy, and start walking away.

Whatever happens, thought Doren, he has no idea of going in and facing me with Uncle Wharton. I wonder why?

HE RANG the doorbell and a uniformed servant answered.

"I wish to see Mr. Grahame on a personal matter that will be of private interest to him."

"Can I take the name, sir?"

"The name I go under is Manson Towers. It may mean nothing to Mr. Grahame, but you can send him this message: When he was five years old his friends called him Wart."

"Do you feel quite well, sir?"

"Yes, I'm well. That message refers to a boyhood nickname. It will show Mr. Grahame I know of his life 'way back."

"I hope he will be interested, sir."

The man left, leaving him in a little room called a study, although there were no books in it. In a few minutes the servant returned.

"I gave him your name and message, sir. He said to tell you that he is aware that you are a patient who has escaped from a sanitarium and that you are—don't blame me, sir—as mad as a hatter."

"Did you mention his kid nickname."

"Yes, sir."

"What did he say?"

"That if I ever repeated it he would discharge me, that it took him nearly fifty years to live that down. You must have met one of his school mates. Hurry along, now, or he threatens to call for the police."

He held the door open, and Doren walked out. No use waiting, either, to waylay his uncle. The latter must believe some cooked-up story about Manson Towers. If he started to inform him that he was really his nephew, that would only confirm the yarn.

He started to walk toward the East River. The tide was low and the odor wasn't as aristocratic as the neighborhood. A little tug went by, blowing and snorting.

He had struck a blow with his fist. He must strike again, but in a greater way, and much harder.

CHAPTER XXI

The Fish That Wouldn't Eat

THERE was only one glorious certainty in connection with Virginia. He knew, now, that she could never have been one of the enemy, but must have been a courier, unknowingly as regards anything dangerous to this country. She must, indeed, have left Europe while her mother was held as a hostage—just as Virginia was now held as a hostage for his fulfilling his promise. When she had tried to make him give up the talisman, even to offering her lovely self, she was doing so conscious only of danger to him.

Well, sometime between this hour and morning he was determined to obtain the talisman. He must find if a secret message be contained inside it.

Doren turned abruptly from the river, walked westward from the little district that was reminiscent of a certain quietly snobbish section of London, before the blitz. After several blocks he noted that he was tired, partly physically but also nervously exhausted from strain. The continued frustration

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of having nothing to fight with against a secret, ruthless group, stretched his emotions to a breaking point.

At Third Avenue he sought the nearest tavern, ordered a sandwich, drank three highballs in rapid succession. Manson Towers wasn't accustomed to drinking. So much the worse for him. Drink eased reality, and if you looked foolishly through a gilded haze, the deception was merciful; a kind of illusion in which your desires didn't seem so impossible of fulfillment. His raw nerves became soothed. Better not try a fourth drink; it was only a lift that he wanted.

Outside, Doren waved to a taxi, stepped in very carefully, gave the driver Towers' uptown address. He would try, from there, to contact Tompkins by phone; in any case lie down and take a few hours' rest. A few hours out of the forty-eight given him. . . .

At the apartment house he drowsily got out of the car, paid the driver and made his way to Manson Towers' apartment. He found the new key that had been made for the changed lock and inserted it. As he opened the door he saw a golden beam of light directly at the floor level and not more than a foot above it. The rest of the apartment was in darkness.

Doren stepped inside, pressed the switch button by the door. Then the light along the floor no longer showed, but he noticed a lighted flashlight lying on the carpet and pointed toward him.

Then he tingled with shock. Beyond it lay a dark huddled figure, resembling an old suit of clothes that had been stuffed. The face was turned away from him.

He closed the outer door gingerly, locked it, and advanced on tip-toe, holding his breath.

He did not touch the man, but he recognized him instantly as the superintendent whom he'd bribed to put a new lock on the apartment door.

He realized what had happened. The fellow had the notion that the tenant wanted to guard something very precious; otherwise why all this change of lock and key? He had bought a duplicate key and had let himself in to take a look around. If the tenant returned he would give an excuse about a loose electrical connection, or a defective water pipe. If he heard a key in the door he figured on ducking into the box-like waiting room, getting out when the tenant passed through into the sitting room. On this visit he had used a flashlight; that could be extinguished instantly, while it took moments to reach an electric light switch.

DOREN stepped to the double window of the sitting room. By the dim moonlight he could see that the fifth floor was nearly level with an expanse of old-fashioned four-story private houses still to be torn down. The lower windows were up, the shades half drawn. Between this house and the next, was a ten-foot alleyway. Anyone on the next roof could line up an occupant of this room; the shot wouldn't even be a difficult one. It could be assumed the little man had been shot by mistake for Manson Towers.

Doren quickly picked up the telephone.

"Give me the nearest police station, operator."

"I shall give you Police Headquarters, sir."

"Okay, make it snappy."

Quickly it came: "Police Headquarters."

He gave his name and address, then said:

"As can be verified by the elevator boy, I just came in. I have been upstate since yesterday, spent the night

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in Poughkeepsie. I find the dead body of the building superintendent lying in the center of my living-room floor."

"Very well. Leave everything as it is. We'll send a squad."

He gave the apartment location and hung up. Then he pressed on the lights in all the rooms. Nothing was disarranged. The intruder evidently hadn't had any time to make a search.

Who could have desired to shoot Manson Towers? That was hard to answer, not knowing about the man's past.

It was possible the real Manson Towers had found the talisman and liked life better as an ex-pilot of the U.S. Army Air Force. He was jealous, because of Norah. Perhaps he knew how to reach one of those roofs. From living here he was aware of the unusual layout. It could be that he had a way of entering one of the empty houses - there were several between here and Central Park West; he could have gone through a top floor trap door, walked over and taken a pot-shot across the alley. . . . Then he might have hurried home to the Grahame house, not far away.

A hard knock came upon the outer apartment door. Doren opened up and two men entered, introduced themselves as detectives assigned to the local precinct. They were middle-aged, a bit hard-eyed; but he was surprised to see they didn't wear iron derbies, but dressed just as ordinary citizens.

Doren explained how he had entered, noticed the light from the fallen flashlight, found the superintendent, and how he had paid the man twenty dollars for a new lock and key. He must have thus given an idea of something of value being hidden. He showed one detective the double window, the level length of roofs and the other side of the narrow court.

The second detective examined the figure on the floor.

"Dead as hell. No weapon on him, and none about. You are not armed, are you, mister?"

Shaking his head, Doren remembered how he had wanted his weapon back. If he had it, an arrest for carrying a concealed weapon would be the least of it.

"The elevator lad said you were only up a few minutes before you telephoned. The coroner will fix the time of death," said the other, "and then we will get in next door and take a look at the roof. Now, mister, we come to the serious part. This rub-out was a mistake, I guess. Who would like to pop you off?"

THIS was what Doren had been waiting for. Tompkins or no Tompkins—he wanted to get in his old home, follow up the clue that had been given him as to the location of the talisman. Here was his chance.

"I don't like to make an accusation against an ex-flier of our army, who has a medical discharge and a silver plate in one arm; but this officer has suffered peculiar nervous maladjustments, and he is crazy about a certain lady I——"

"Does he live near here?"

"Yes, he does—a Captain Doren Grahame."

He gave the street and number of the private house.

"I met him late today, downtown in the Sutton Place district. We had words. I lost my temper, forgot his disability, and I'm afraid that I struck him."

"I see. And did he make any threats?"

Doren tried to look both wise and dumb. He did not reply to the question.

The first detective turned to the second.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I could wait for the doc. You can go over with this Mr. Towers and see if you can locate Captain Grahame."

"Oh yes," said Doren, as if reluctantly, "I forgot to say that Grahame was in a mental sanitarium, put there by his uncle, but he broke out and hasn't been returned."

The two men shot significant glances at each other. Then Doren was led out, but not before a quick frisk of his clothes had been made for a possible weapon.

"Some of these returned soldiers suffer shock. What classification were you in, buddie?"

"Not 1-A," Doren replied faintly. He hoped that was true, as it proved to be the next morning, at the local draft board. Manson Towers had a heart flutter, and a condition that might develop into a leaking valve. But it was only later he knew why the change, even with a silver plate, might be desired as a permanent thing. Just then the question threw him off balance.

One certainty hammered in his mind. If he had been shot by this enemy it must be that the killer and Norah had ceased seeing eye to eye. She had given him forty-eight hours. Of course if the talisman had been recovered, even a few hours was too long.

That Norah and the others needed him no longer would mean he had no chance to rescue Virginia.

"Have you known this Grahame for a long time?" asked the detective, as the two walked along.

"Yes," replied Doren, more truthfully than the other could realize. "I can say I know him better than himself. He was the usual young college grad until the war. Then he enlisted and put heart and soul into the air service. Being wounded and medically discharged had a peculiar effect upon him. He was lost on what is called the home front, couldn't find himself again, and he became irrational."

"Some of those birds get too familiar with deadly weapons."

"Yes, and I've a thought. A check might be made on that janitor who was killed by mistake. Perhaps he had a record."

"A check will be made as a matter of course. Say, just why did you have a new lock put on by him?"

Doren shrugged. "Must have been feeling uneasy. Well, here we are."

HE CLIMBED the long steps and rang the bell, the jangling sound of which he remembered from childhood. A long, uneasy wait. No one answered. Doren said:

"You know, one night we came back here, and Grahame had lost his key. He had a way to get in."

Suiting the action to the word, Doren threw a leg over the brownstone wall that projected out, over three feet high, from the building, reached a four-inch projection under the bay windows, edged along, leaning forward. He pushed his fingers up, found the nearest window wasn't locked. He went in, head first, unheeding the startled yell of the police officer.

Inside, it was dry and musty. He leaped to his feet, ran to the hallway. The outer bolt was in the door; he shot it back.

"You have the makings of a burglar yourself," growled the detective suspiciously.

Doren didn't explain he had first used that method of entering as a boy. There was a lot you couldn't say and make sense.

"I'll go ahead. His quarters are on the next floor, in the rear. Most of this house is like a museum of the nineties."

"Do you know the location of an

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

electric switch?"

Padding up the stairs, Doren did not answer. He soon saw that the door leading to his former quarters was ajar. A thin stream of light cut the darkness.

"Are you there, Tompkins?"

No reply.

"Captain Grahame, this is the police. Show yourself."

Still there was silence. The detective pushed Doren aside. He pushed the door back, stepped inside, and then he whistled very low and long.

"Come along. Hurry!"

Doren was blocked by the other's form but over his shoulder he could see the figure lying upon the floor by the window at the corner.

He brushed by an arm, ran over and knelt beside Tompkins, whose eyes were closed; unconscious, his breath came raspingly. Blood from a chest wound had seeped through his coat.

"Call an ambulance," he ordered, and the officer sprang to a phone on a little side table. "Grahame tried a clean up job tonight."

Without caring how his familiarity with the quarters might be taken, he rushed to a closet, secured a bottle of brandy, poured a slug into a glass, opened Tompkins' mouth, s l o w l y dribbled the liquor between his lips. He coughed. His eyes opened. A blank stare was replaced by recognition.

"He got me, swore he would get you. Playing with Katherine. Crazy . . . Wants to stay Grahame."

The voice was low, husky and weak.

"A doctor is coming, pal. Try to hold on for a minute."

Doren leaned over, his ear close to Tompkins' lips.

"Tell me, where is the talisman?"

The man smiled faintly, his eyes closed, and he appeared unconscious again. Or did he merely refuse the request?

ARISING, Doren went over to the open desk. On it lay the usual envelopes and note paper, and a stock of bills was anchored on a long shining spike.

He remembered Tompkins' words to him: "One of us knowing is enough. . . . *I've left a clue for you among your bills.*"

The new bills would, of course, be at the top of the stack. He flipped over one after the other. The detective was now busy trying to get another number on the telephone. Yes, that was the electric, this the laundry. What was this one?

Paid to B. Bowbowers $2.50 for a new addition to your collection.

Doren glanced over at the glass cases containing his collection of oriental fish. He didn't remember any dealer, B. Bowbowers, though that odd name faintly echoed in his memory. He reached over, got a telephone book, ruffled the pages. B. Bowbowers was a jeweler, watch repair expert, with a Yonkers address.

Why, that was where Tompkins had stopped off to have the talisman examined by microscope for a trace of message or code!

He arose quietly, went over to the line of glass cases. On a little stand was a box of white fish food that was sold in thin cakes. Doren crumpled one in his hand, threw it into the water. The fish in that case all came to the surface to feed. He tried the second case with another cake. The fish rose —all save one fish he could see swaying near the bottom of the tank near an aquatic plant.

The detective's back was half turned. He was storming at the operator.

Doren pulled the sleeve of his coat up as far as he could above the wrist. He plunged his hand into the water, grasped the fish, pulled it away from the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plant to which the end of it had been tied. In another instant the talisman was in his side pocket. Part of his sleeve was wet. He continued to feed the fish. . . .

He overheard the officer talking rapidly over the telephone.

From outside came the sound of an ambulance siren.

"Stay here, I'll let 'em in," said the dick, hanging up.

Very soon Tompkins was placed on a stretcher. He would be given first aid on the way to Bellevue Hospital.

As the men in white carried the wounded man out, the detective turned to Doren a bit grimly.

"We have sent out a routine command to pick up Captain Grahame, and the army will help us, if he is in uniform. However, Mr. Towers, my mate has been in touch with the Homicide Department. Captain Martin tells him you are a glutton for being around where there is murder. It seems he had a little job of checking up, because of queries from Dutchess County. You and your wife, it appears, were in a lonely cabin—she was defending herself, you were knocked cold. Somehow the revolver went off. One dead man. At your apartment a second stiff. Then you were able to know there was trouble here—and you get in like a second-story man.

"My partner just called back the head of Homicide. Captain Martin wants that you be brought down town. He needs time for a more detailed investigation. As a routine procedure, you probably will be held forty-eight hours as a material witness. You see, there's a funny angle: upstate you had a wife, Norah. Now we find you living in what sure must be a bachelor apartment; not a trace of a dame or her things, not even an extra tooth brush in the bathroom."

"I see your point of view, and that of Captain Martin," said Doren, "but first I insist you telephone the local office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. To call what I've been dipping into as unAmerican activity would be an understatement. Just tell 'em that I have inside dope on Maldren Baerton; that it was his bodyguard, Don Blatten, who was killed up in that cabin in Dutchess County. This is a spot where not an hour can be lost. If you pass this up you won't have as much of a job as a rabbit."

"Where do you want a F.B.I. operative to be sent to see you? Here?"

"No, over at the apartment would be best. It would look good if you handcuff me, taking me over. I'm not sure that this house isn't being watched. I wouldn't even trust this telephone. Drop in at the corner drug store on Eighth Avenue."

"Okay. We have orders never to refuse a request like yours. Stick out your right arm."

The detective flipped a bracelet over Doren's wrist with the dexterity of long habit, and in another instant Doren was chained to the other. The detective pulled him toward the door. Well, no time to lose. There was less than forty-eight hours to go.

CHAPTER XXII

The Talisman

THE two handcuffed men didn't do very well getting down the stairs and outer steps to the street. After that it was easier.

"You threw a bolt back at the front door?"

"Sure," said Doren.

"Then how did Captain Grahame get out?"

"Maybe the way I got in."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The man lost interest. Down at the corner, the drug store was empty of customers. At the back stood 'phone booths. It was a tight fit for both men to crowd into one. Doren, after a connection was made, had to repeat Baerton's name. That must have struck a spark. He was told to hold everything until an operative came up to the apartment.

"I never heard of that guy. What did he do?" the detective asked as they left the store.

"Never mind," said Doren, quietly.

Nothing more was said on the walk back to the Manson Towers apartment. Inside, several new men were waiting and one of them, addressed as Captain, wasn't in good humor.

"What's the big idea, phoning the F.B.I., Carton?"

"He asked for it."

"Two dead men, and the third in doubt, and maybe we get a brush off. Give me a report."

Carton did just that only he garbled what Tompkins had said. Asked if he could clarify, Doren shrugged his shoulders. During the conversation that followed, he gathered that footprints had been found where a man might have fired from the opposite roof into this room. He was sure the same man who had killed the superintendent had also shot down Tompkins. He was worried about his friend. The murder angle was the business of these officers, and touched him only in that he wanted to get out of being held.

He could see that Captain Martin and these precinct men were afraid a juicy newspaper plum would be snatched away—a headline stolen from the Homicide Bureau.

Doren said: "Captain, did you find the house Grahame used to reach the roof?"

At that, Captain Martin gave him a dirty look. "You seem pretty cute at entering. There's lots off color about you. Upstate, you lived with your wife—here no trace of a woman; not even face powder, and you can always find *that* wherever a dame has parked. You know too much. How could you tell about a man shot down over at Grahame's? That story of the upstate killing seems pretty thin; that 'defending the honor' gag has become moth-eaten. Just where does your wife live?"

Doren shook his head. He actually didn't know, but they wouldn't believe it.

"Perhaps you did all three shootings yourself, Towers. I bet enough could be pinned on you—if I don't get one of those hands-off orders."

"Now that we are all here and accounted for until Mr. Hoover's men arrive, you might take off this bracelet."

"Okay, Carton. . . . Boy, this burns me up!. I sent out an alarm for Grahame. The newspaper lads down at Headquarters are all set to eat up a story; and now I'm tongue-tied till the Feds get here and decide. In the old days we had this town tied up for ourselves."

"With a nice private room and some swell old fashioned treatments," put in Doren dryly, for he had lived in New York all his life, save for service in the air corp, and he knew of the barbaric methods of the third degree.

"Kid glove stuff don't get you anywhere," growled the captain.

These mastiffs of the law hated to let go, Doren knew. He realized that time would be lost unless he was rescued from them.

THINKING of his story he wanted desperately to have believed, he realized only two points where he could present facts. Maldren Baerton was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one; the talisman the other. But it was a question what the latter might lead to: a great secret . . . or nothing. No, it couldn't be nothing. Fate couldn't be so cruel.

Deeply hidden in the unconscious, or subconscious, he felt he might grasp, if only his reach was sufficiently perceptive, a means to double-cross Norah and her crowd. He was annoyingly teased by a possibility. . .

Just then the uniformed man opened the door and a visitor entered.

"Captain Martin? You remember me? I don't need to let you see my credentials?"

"No sir. Shall we leave?"

"Please. I take it this is Manson Towers?"

Doren nodded.

"I'm James Courduer, of a branch associated with Army G 2."

He waited until the police officers were outside.

Then: "Your mentioning Maldren Baerton interests us. He worked mysteriously, lived mysteriously, but it's no secret now that had he entered this country again, before his death, we would have had some pertinent questions to ask him."

"What kind of questions?"

"I'm not here to answer that, Mr. Towers. From what I hear, you asked for an F.B.I. operative while the New York Homicide Department was interested in you—and several murders. Remember, we don't step in on surmise."

Doren considered the man. About forty, tall, thin, with the manner of a business executive, he had the manner of one who might very readily become annoyed. With so many crack-pots about, he supposed the F.B.I. had been subjected to many false alarms.

"My story is almost incredible," began Doren.

"The spies who landed from a rubber boat out of a submarine, that was incredible. A few years back the German robot plane, with gasoline engine, rocket, jet-propulsion, gyroscope device for course control, would have seemed a dream. It isn't the incredible we stick at; it is wild links that won't make a chain. But I came here for you to talk. Tell it from the beginning, in detail, for I may take a few notes for a report."

I am in for it, thought Doren. He tried to be cool, impersonal, and matter-of-fact as he narrated one episode after another. Now and again the operative made a note on a pad, asked a little more as to names and places; his face was keen, he listened closely, and if he experienced any inner surprise at the developments at Dr. Leonard's sanitarium, there was nothing in his expression to reveal it.

THE operative finally stopped Doren's account when he came to the words gasped by Tompkins in a short interval of consciousness. What did he mean by them?

"Why did he want to get you and, Tompkins?"

"You mean by *he*—Grahame? I can assume only that Norah told him of the deal with me—the agreement that I be changed back. He wanted to continue to stay in his new body—a better one than this—aside from the damaged left arm—and he figured that he could get away with two killings and never have it proved that he committed them. Perhaps he already has established some kind of an alibi for his time."

The operative nodded. "I am not going to tell you, at this time, just what hints and rumors have come to us. But I believe you will be a tremendous aid, and I won't ask you if you will risk it. I know you will do so for your country, and for that lovely young woman."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Don't you want to see the talisman?"

Somehow Doren felt a bit grieved and disappointed. After all he had gone through, he thought it would be peered at eagerly.

"We shall take that to a specialist. The thing now to decide: what is to be the first move? This is your chance to start on the offensive, after taking it and taking it. What do you suggest?"

Doren bent forward eagerly in his chair.

"Call back that head of the Homicide Squad. What time is it?"

"Ten-thirty."

"Plenty of time. Order the Captain to give a story to the newspaper boys at Headquarters that will implicate Doren Grahame, for whom an alarm is now out, but don't let it be known I ever entered the Grahame house. I feel sure that Virginia Borzia is held at the sanitarium. Just where the murderer is, I don't know. But when he reads the morning paper he will, I think, get there as quickly as possible and try to talk his way out with his own people."

"That sounds okay to me. The yarn can say, too, that you are held as a witness. When you show up at your office tomorrow you can say you were released, as Grahame wasn't picked up."

"Very well," said Doren, "but——"

"An explanation will go to city editors of all the New York sheets, as well as to heads of the press bureaus. We too can use news for our own purposes."

"But we can go on from here. Only one thing: Tompkins spoke of Grahame playing with Katherine Wiswell, to whom he had once been engaged. She is too light-headed to be warned. . . ."

"The two have been seen together at the Stork Club and at 21. A columnist, only yesterday, spoke of their again being 'on fire.' A reporter will call her, give her the news, ask if she has anything to say. You know what the answer will be from one of those girls whose war effort is entertaining officers and being heroines by serving common soldiers at the Stage Door Canteen."

Yes, Doren thought, as he nodded; I know.

The F.B.I. man stepped to the outer door and told the policeman to call Captain Martin. Doren relaxed in his chair with a new feeling of relief; reinforcements had arrived; he was no longer alone.

SMOOTHLY the car driven by the Hoover operative sped through Central Park. Seated beside Courduer, Doren felt that he had shifted his troubles. The other had arranged the newspaper stories for tomorrow, got him away before the reporters swooped down on the apartment. Suddenly he was brought up short when Courduer said:

"You realize that you must go through to the finish?"

"I hoped . . ."

"Guess you are thinking of the movies, with raids here and raids there. We can't move until we have evidence—and that which applies to the sanitarium will be after you get there, make the change back to yourself, and rescue your girl."

"The talisman?"

"We are going to see about that tonight. You wouldn't know, but we have consulting experts in different specialties. We are calling on an old man who is an authority on ancient jewelry, and not a bad hand at codes. He is a wealthy hobby-rider, fortunately patriotic."

Doren wanted to ask questions but decided it would be better to keep quiet and coast along a bit. Courduer must know what he was doing.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The car slipped out of the gloomy park into Fifth Avenue, turned eastward and stopped just before reaching Madison Avenue. Doren followed his guide into the basement of an old-fashioned private house. Courduer rang, a long and a short. The door opened and someone said, "Come in." The two men followed down a dimly lighted hall into a big room, the walls of which were lined to the ceiling with book shelves.

An old man turned and smiled and bowed. His wing collar and tie were museum pieces of the nineties, and his clothing matched them, together with high button shoes.

"I received your telephone call and I'm quite excited," he said in a thin voice. "A new puzzle for me?"

"We shall see," said the operative, who introduced Doren, slurring both names. "The fact is, old friend, I came to you because you are an expert on ancient jewelry. We have a glass fish which is supposed to be ancient. It was brought over from Europe by an unwitting courier. The man who knew the secret on this end, Maldren Baerton, the financier, died suddenly. After the fish was on its way, the two men in Europe who knew were killed by a block-buster and the secret died with them. Thus the importance to enemy plotters of what this gentleman calls a talisman."

"A charm?"

"Yes," said Doren, taking the fish from his pocket, this fish is supposed originally to have been given magic power by the great Greek, Pythagoras."

The old man crossed to a flat table. All brought up chairs. The fish was placed on a black cloth in front of the expert.

He nodded. "Very ancient, very ancient indeed. The carving has the simplicity of the Greek in the noble period before. . . . well, you wouldn't be interested. As to magic . . . when rooms can hold an atmosphere of those who lived and loved in them, so that ghosts can be seen generations later through the imprint of their personalities, why couldn't this ornament hold through the centuries the stamp of magic given by a great magician? But —that wasn't why you brought this to me, I am sure. You, at any rate, Mr. Courduer, are what is called a practical man."

"If you could hear the yarn I listened to, and believed, tonight, you'd doubt it. No, a message or code must be on or *in* the fish. A jeweler examined the outer surface, found nothing."

THE OLD fellow picked up the talisman, fondled it, murmured that it was made of a transparent composition, not glass, the secret of the making having been lost in antiquity. He screwed a barrel with a magnifying glass into his right eye, went over the surface of the ornament carefully.

He sighed, shook his head. Then his fingers, delicate and sensitive, touched the little golden hoop at the mouth of the fish through which Virginia had trust a thin chain to carry it about her neck.

His thumb and forefinger tightened and the hoop moved to the left. He turned it, and to Doren's surprise the fish began to open at the bottom until it was spread out upon the black cloth like an oyster, displaying the golden color of the under surface. And on each curved side was an oval sheet of paper, thin as tissue.

Two rims of gold were connected with the tiny hoop; the latter worked as a slowly moving spring when it was turned; but Doren was too fascinated by the two ovals of paper to think of that and even Courdeur displayed ex-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

citement.

The microscope tube went back into the expert's eye.

"There is a tiny map on one oval; directions on the other. Mr. Courdeur, if you will go over to that roll-top desk in the corner, you will find paper and a pen and ink horn. I shall copy the map and the writing, upon a larger scale, as quickly as I can. But you must be patient; neither my sight nor my skill is what it once was."

"I'm not going to be trapped into a compliment," said the federal man, with a grin. "Take your time."

He turned to Doren.

"I bet the way you feel, this is well worth waiting for."

Doren nodded.

"It should be a double life saver—Virginia's and mine—just to speak selfishly; but also I hope we shall smash their plot and land 'em."

"Yes," said the other grimly; "for now I can get all the help that will be needed. You couldn't know, of course; but until that charm opened and I saw those oval sheets, I was going along with your fantastic yarn just on a hundred to one outside hunch. The only realistic angle was that Baerton was suspected of being an Axis tool, and that a vast fortune he was credited with appears to have evaporated. Of course one can't pass up any chance these days."

"But if I hadn't the talisman?" persisted Doren.

The operative shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm afraid I'd have disbelieved the rest of your account—and allowed the police to take you down town."

That made Doren feel better, as he sat patiently watching the aged hobbyist copy with extreme carefulness; it would have been useless to go to the F.B.I. until he had the talisman.

The drawback was that Tompkins was now lying between life and death. Whatever the importance of the secret message and the map, a call must be made to the hospital for news before leaving here.

"After he finishes and we have a check-up, we must phone and learn how Tompkins is taking the lead you missed," said Courduer, as if reading his thoughts; "and then I'm figuring on leaving you here for the night. I'll call for you early in the morning. You have a full day ahead of you."

He nodded toward the intent worker bent over the talisman and the paper.

"You mustn't wait up for him. He will have quite a detail drill ahead of him. But he won't care. There are many, many ways of toil the public never dreams of that go toward aiding to win a war."

Doren agreed, but the operative would have been surprised if he could have matched his thoughts again. For the former was hoping that the ornament really had the magic power credited to it. His wish had been all for Virginia; but with a little forethought he had put himself in it with her.

CHAPTER XXIII

Changes

WHEN Doren awoke, he lay a while in a kind of a dreamy daze, full consciousness returning little by little. He was in a wide bed in an unfamiliar room, in the house of the aged helper who must have worked long after he had done what he could to aid him.

A feeling of guilt regarding Tompkins too had been lifted; the hospital had given out its usual report, when things go well: "The patient is out of danger and doing as well as might be expected."

Expected by whom, he questioned whimsically—the doctor, the patient, or

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his friends? Well, the old boy would get well, and he would never be a servant again. But would he permit promotion? What loyalty was there, what endurance. . . .

A timid knock at the door. It opened. A servant quite as old as his master entered. On the tray which he placed on a chair by the bed, was a tempting breakfast and a folded morning newspaper. With a stiff: "Good morning, sir. I hope you slept well," he retired without waiting for a reply.

Doren reached for the coffee. After a cup of it, strong, without cream, he took the newspaper and found what he sought, on the front page.

EX-PILOT SOUGHT BY POLICE TO EXPLAIN SHOOTINGS

The police, today, sent out an interstate alarm for Captain Doren Grahame, recently medically discharged from the U.S. Army Air Corps after a distinguished career as a flier in the Pacific, in an effort to explain one mysterious murder and another shooting which took a victim to Bellevue Hospital, seriously wounded.

As events have been reconstructed by Captain Edward Martin of the Homicide Department, Captain Grahame, according to the few words said by the wounded man, first shot down his servant, Tommy Tompkins, in a private dwelling long owned by the Grahame family. The ex-pilot then made his way through an adjoining empty house to an expanse of roofs, from where he fired across a court into an open window on the fifth floor of The Beldame Apartments, fatally wounding Charles Morton, the superintendent, whose presence in the room in which he was found slain has not been explained.

The apartment was occupied by Manson Towers, whose offices are at 444 Park Avenue, and who returned home shortly after the shooting. It appears that earlier in the day Towers and Captain Grahame, had quarreled in the Sutton Place district.

Before the war, Captain Grahame was engaged to a member of the Junior League set, Miss Katherine Wiswell. According to the newspaper columnists the engagement had since been broken off, but rumor said a reconciliation had taken place. This was denied by Mrs. Marion Wiswell, since Miss Wiswell could not be reached.

The reporter interviewed Dr. Spencer Rawlings, a mental specialist, on his opinion of war shock and hypertension as they might affect pilots.

Said Dr. Rawlings:

"It is my opinion . . ."

The item finished with an account of Doren Grahame's college education, his record as an athlete, and his family. It gave something of an impression to the reader that he would have received from perusing an obituary.

Doren noticed that no information was given as to whether Manson Towers had been released or held as a material witness. It was obvious that the story line had been followed as dictated by the F.B.I., but only to one on the inside. Mr. Towers apparently had spoken of the quarrel, otherwise he had kept his mouth shut, which was as it should be. There could be no suspicion that enemy activity, Maldren Baerton, the killing of his bodyguard, or the talisman had in any way entered into the investigation.

After a glance at the war news, Doren

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

threw down the paper, finished his breakfast, and washed and dressed. He hoped this was the last day he would be forced to see Manson Towers' face reflected when he looked into a mirror.

The door opened and Jimmie Courduer entered. He offered Doren a little wooden box and told him to slip it into his pocket.

"I have the timing all set. We shall catch a train at Yonkers, get that box into a Greenwich hotel safe deposit box. You will give up the key and the location *after* you have been changed back to Doren Grahame—and *after* you and Miss Borzia are over the New York state line. Then the car you two will be driven in may wait for a telephone call from the real Manson Towers that he has recovered the talisman."

Doren nodded. "So mistrust on both sides can be satisfied."

"After that you will be released. So don't fear."

"Thinking of Virginia drives away all fear from me," declared Doren grimly. " Let's go—or am I supposed to thank our host?"

"The poor old boy is asleep," said Courdeur, "after a good job. We won't wake him."

IT was two o'clock when Doren arrived at the door of his office, entered, walked into his private room and confronted Norah. The woman was almost speechless from anger.

"Is this the way you go about keeping your promise? You say you wish to be changed back to yourself. Why, that self might be in prison, charged with murder!"

"Was I supposed to be murdered to oblige your transplanted husband?" asked Doren mildly.

"You needn't have linked him up with the affair."

"Indeed, and how else could I give an explanation that would keep me from jail?"

"You could have fenced with lies. Of course, they went right to the house ——"

"Where my pal might now be lying dead, lacking medical help. I don't give a hang about my former self, except to insist upon getting back into him. I'm worrying about Virginia. I'm willing and able to keep my part of the bargain."

"Then it was as he conjectured you had the talisman hidden in the apartment. After the shooting he tried to get in to make a search, and found you had a new lock put on."

"Did he shoot Tompkins?"

"I don't know. He wanted a clean sweep—and the talisman—for he wishes to stay as Captain Grahame."

"Then," said Doren, "he has another wish coming."

"You have brought the talisman?" she asked eagerly.

"Why don't you put out your lily-white hand, ask me to drop it on the palm, seal my own death notice? You can't always get a stand-in for your murders."

He explained the set-up as outlined by Courduer. After the exchange of bodies, and after Virginia and he and the real Manson Towers had left the sanitarium, he would give over the key and the location of the safe deposit box. He would show how the signature could be written in simple, childish handwriting. A telephone call would come back, the talisman recovered. . . .

"Then you and Virginia——?"

"I'll take her to the nearest justice of the peace—and we will be off on our honeymoon. Just as far away from New York as we can get, until all this blows over. That servant is recover-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing; and I'm certain the police will find the apartment superintendent had a past police record, and was shot after entering with intent of theft."

"Guess you saw that in one of the afternoon newspapers. If you had only been killed, and the talisman recovered, the shooting of the servant was going to be tied to you. A dead man can't talk back."

"Sorry I spoiled everything, and I suppose I should apologize. . . . Norah, I think it is about time for us to get a divorce. Don't let any soft, sweet nothings hold us up. Let's start for the sanitarium."

"It will be a relief to get back my own man."

"Yeah, and be sure that he stays your own. During this switch he was crooning to Katherine Wiswell. Ever see her pretty pan in the picture papers, wielding a champagne bottle at a ship christening or at The Stork Club? Kinda tough having to go back to you."

Norah swung at him, but he ducked.

"Save it for him," Doren taunted. "Do we go up by car?"

"It has been waiting at a parking space near here for hours."

"Come on, then."

He grabbed her, swung her lightly toward the door.

Norah broke from his grasp, her eyes narrowed. She had her plans, deemed them excellent. If this lucky fool had anything up his sleeve, the trick had better be good.

"WELL, if it ain't my old pals, the tongue-tied muscle men," said Doren.

The two men in the back seat went right on smoking. They acted like robots but weren't nearly as interesting. Theirs to obey and be paid, and as for the thinking, let someone else do it.

Norah drove, competently, just as she did everything else.

"I'm glad you kept mum about Don Blatten," she ventured.

"Oh, the New York police force is big," he replied, "and that detail never reached the Homicide Squad. I didn't want to be detained, you know."

"Yes, you yearn for that delicate bundle of femininity. Men never admire strength and purpose in a woman."

"They say a lioness is tougher to train than a lion. I guess they squeezed the milk of human kindness out of you, Norah, when you were a cub."

Her eyes glinted angrily.

"I always had to fight for my own. My father walked out on my mother, in Paris, when I was a year old, and after that we lived in garrets. My mother was honest, poor thing, and it was good she died before I was sixteen. I decided men would pay from then on. I was beautiful. Now I am thirty-five, don't look it under electric lights with the right gowns and make-up. I want the security I can get by other means."

"I see; no matter at whose expense. I suppose you are an internationalist—which means one without a country."

"You mean," she said, "I'm not blinded by national illusions. France had liberty and fraternity. . . ."

"It will have it again. I never wanted a Gestapo in this country, but I'd like to see the monsters working on you, Norah. When I realize what you threatened for Virginia——"

Little more was said by either Norah or himself, and you would never have known two men sat in the back seat. At length the car drew up before Dr. Leonard's sanitarium.

Doren followed Norah inside, and up the stairs to the big room, one side of it curtained, and he saw again the two chairs facing not far apart. And then Dr. Leonard entered, with the Profes-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sor, hunched and bearded, followed by a man with blood-shot eyes who once had been himself.

Norah explained the deal that had been made. If there was a slip-up one of the guards would shoot to kill. Better get this over with quickly.

Again the curtain was swept aside, the two men seated themselves, the electric bands for the heads were swung over and lowered. Came a buzz of electric motors, then that long, dream-like state and the wrenching sensation. . . .

Lights were blinding Doren's eyes. He glanced down—saw that he was in uniform once more, and a gasp of relief hurt his chest.

Opposite him sat Manson Towers, flexing the muscles of his arms, and stretching wide his fingers.

Doren said: "I didn't enjoy being you, Towers. It was punishment. I hope you didn't do anything I wouldn't do with my body. I feel a little unclean. There is something grimy about your soul."

"Now," said Dr. Leonard, "no hard words, gentlemen. Norah, bring the young woman downstairs. I have called a taxi for our visitors."

He beckoned to Doren, led him out to the gravel path. A side door opened. Virginia came toward him, her expression beaming a dear welcome.

Doren said: "Darling, it is wonderful to see you. Come what may, I'm never going to let you out of my sight, unless I know where you are and that you'll be waiting for me when I arrive home . . ."

"Keep the sentiments; you make me blush," cut in Norah. "Get in the front seat, Virginia. Your hero will ride in the back with the boys."

THE car pulled out and Doren gave directions. He would give his information when they had been driven well over the state line. He could not keep his gaze from Virginia. All he could see, her shoulders, her clustered curls—all was precious to him.

Norah drove swiftly. Finally Doren figured the time had arrived.

"Telephone, if you wish, Norah, and then get a taxi and meet Towers in Greenwich. Here is the key to Hotel Dasmore deposit box 104, and here is a sample of the way I signed. We will stop at that filling station, get the number of the telephone. You can give one of your dummies a ring that you have the talisman okay, and then Virginia and I will leave you and be on our way."

The waiting was long, until the telephone message came from Norah.

Bert returned, climbed into the driver's seat.

"I'll let you folks out further south," he announced, and started the car.

Doren had Virginia in the back seat. He was holding her hands. He wanted to hold her tight, smother her with kisses. He felt as if she were the first and only girl in all the world. It was wonderful to feel that way, with all the known possibilities of happiness that only are realized with maturity.

"We are not out of the woods, darling, but do not be afraid."

"I'm not afraid any longer," she said simply. "I heard a bit of unguarded talk in the sanitarium. My mother has safely reached Lisbon, and is forever out of the clutches of those fiends. No longer am I a hostage."

"Did you know why you were brought to the sanitarium?"

"No, Doren. There is so much I don't understand."

"I shall give it you, in relays. Now we are going to be married just as soon as possible and go away on an endless honeymoon."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Part of that was true, part of it was for the benefit of the guards.

The car sped southward on the broad highway.

Suddenly the driver saw what he had been waiting to see.

He pulled over to the side of the road, behind a stationary gray car.

Two men stood by the hood, clad in the impressive uniform of State Troopers, every bullet in their belts polished and shining.

Bert ran toward them, talked quickly.

"You are of the State Police? I have in this car a man and a girl. I overheard their conversation after I picked them up. They were hitch hiking. He is Captain Doren Grahame, wanted for questioning by the New York City police department, in connection with one murder and one near-killing."

One of the troopers strolled over.

"Yes, I read of the case, and we received the alarm." Then he spoke directly to Doren. "Are you Captain Grahame?"

"Yes, and this is my fiancee. We are on our way to be married."

"I'm afraid there will be an interruption. You will kindly come along with me. The lady can come too, if she wishes."

"I'd like to see anyone part us again," said Doren grimly, as he helped Virginia from the car. He took her by the arm protectively.

The trooper was taking down details from the driver, as he led her over to the gray car. Doren waved as the two muscle-men drove away.

CHAPTER XXIV

Ringside

"WHERE are you taking us?" asked Doren.

"To Station M. You answer the description, all right, and admit you are Captain Grahame."

"Yes, but there is more in this than meets the eye. I wish to talk to the officer in charge of the station."

The trooper said okay. Virginia took him by the arm.

"I don't understand, dear. Are you in trouble?"

"Don't worry," he replied. "Back at the sanitarium, Norah and the rest are chuckling at the bitter joke they've played on us. They think I'll face a different kind of music than a wedding march. But we are not alone now, darling. You'll realize how wonderful that is."

The gray car slid to a stop before what appeared to be a square, white pill-box, with an American flag flying on top. Another car braked in behind it.

Jimmie Courduer stepped from the second car. He saluted informally.

"The two of you go right inside. I'll follow," he said, out of the side of his mouth. "Take no chances, even though I'm sure we are not followed."

"Who is that?" asked Virginia.

"Reinforcements," said Doren, "that marvelous, not-being-alone stuff."

They followed the F.B.I. operative to a headquarters room, where he showed the officer in charge his authoritative credentials, explained this was pressing government business, and he wanted charge of the prisoner, and no publicity. The officer telephoned Albany. Okay from there. Then Jimmie Courduer got his New York office.

The late afternoon newspapers were given the news that Captain Doren Grahame had been captured, upon returning to the state, after holing up in Connecticut. He was being held for questioning. No charges had as yet been made, so he was being detained

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

merely as a material witness. Newspaper men would not be allowed to interview him, since he was in a highly nervous condition.

"I'm going to loan you my car," said Courdeur, "and I see no reason why pleasure and business can't be combined. I must go back to my work, so I can't give away the bride."

Virginia looked flustered.

"Doren talks about our honeymoon, yet he hasn't proposed. Am I the bride you are talking about?"

"Why, I assumed . . ."

"Without a trousseau," she gasped.

"I'm going to make an honest wench out of you, trousseau or no trousseau—but, then, you can get some needed things in Poughkeepsie tomorrow morning, or the morning after. It all depends, doesn't it, Mr. Courdeur?"

"That it does. Stock in some food on the way to the lake. It may be tonight—indeed, I think it will be—but one can't tell. You deserve a ringside seat at one finish, anyway."

Doren and Virginia had no chance to thank him, as he darted out. As they left the State Police Officer, and walked to the car left for them, a motorcycle, with side car, could be seen speeding into the distance.

Doren helped the girl into the seat beside the driver. He too sped southward, until he reached a roadway that would go over to a northern route near the Hudson River.

"Consider yourself proposed to, Virginia. The first proposal came from you, remember. You won't want to spend a night with a bachelor in his remote lake side bungalow. We must make things respectable. Oh, darling, it is all so quick, now. There will be lots of time for me to go into the raptures of a poet. . . ."

"Will you compose sonnets to my eyes?"

"Yes, and to your lips, and that dainty chin, and your curls, and your curves, and everything. No one shall see them but ourselves—or I would get shot."

"Where—where will we be married?"

"In a little town that doesn't even boast a weekly newspaper. I met the minister, once, while fishing, and he will keep our secret as long as it needs to be kept."

AT seven o'clock that night Doren and Virginia stocked up on food at the general store at Parrisville. They were married at eight at the Christian Church. At eight-thirty they were on the way north, headed for Doren's bungalow on Dawson Lake. It was all very routine and even ordinary, except in their hearts.

Both Doren and Virginia were tired by the time the car pulled in behind a bungalow facing the lake. There were several other summer homes nearby; no lights showed; it was as yet early in the season.

Doren got in by a side window, turned on all the lights, found a duplicate set of keys, opened up, and grabbing up his wife in his arms he carried her over the threshold.

"Now I shall prove to you that your husband can cook," he said lightly, while, woman-like, Virginia began to examine the comfortable bungalow.

After a delightful meal, Virginia leaned across the little kitchen table.

"It has been a relief, darling, to have you take over my destiny, without hardly a by-your-leave, but I am in confusion. I think, for a woman, I've stifled my curiosity very effectively. Now give, Doren; tell me all."

He nodded, passed her a cigarette, and began. Nothing did he conceal except the change she had escaped at the sanitarium; that was so horrible he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

didn't wish to take the chance of it leaving a morbid stain on her memory. He told about the bungalow on the other body of water, Parker Lake, about a mile away, supposed to belong to "Tim Smith" but really the property of Maldren Baerton.

"The plot is, my dear, that we expect the conspirators to go north from New York, and meet there—following the details supplied by the talisman. We are going to be ready with a reception committee. I think it is too soon to expect any round-up tonight."

"On our wedding night! I hope not."

But at eleven o'clock there came a tapping on a north window. Doren opened it.

"I've been sent by Courdeur," whispered a voice. "He said you might be needed."

"I'll be right along."

He began explaining to Virginia, but she insisted upon accompanying him, and he—a first-day groom—wouldn't argue with her. They slipped out the back door, into the night, and joined a stranger. He said that two cars had reached the bungalow on Parker Lake. The group might, or might not, come to the old ice house at the southern end of Dawson Lake, but it might be that a removal of all that was hidden there had been decided upon.

The man who had tapped upon the window acted as guide. He took them a roundabout way, until all three were standing upon a little hill looking down on a small field-stone building, used years before to store ice, when ice was cut in the winter for rural consumption. Now electric refrigerators had done away with all that.

Suddenly the sound of motors could be heard. First one car, then another, stopped at a distance, and people could be seen, flashing electric torches on an old cattle road and coming this way. Murmuring came from in front of the ice house, locked only with a wooden latch from the outside; then silence.

A POWERFUL headlight beamed from a mound by the lake, directly at the door of the ice house.

A shot was fired in the air.

Out from the ice house came a huddled group of people.

"Roger and Bert," ordered a voice, "drop your revolvers out here where we can see them. I hold a Tommy gun, so no nonsense."

Doren recognized the voice of Jimmie Courduer.

Suddenly he gasped:

"Why, there is my uncle, Wharton Grahame!"

Virginia sensed the painful tension in his voice.

"I'll bet he was the deputy of Maldren Baerton," he went on bitterly. "To think of a traitor in the family! And he framed me!"

"There are traitors in every family," she told him quietly. "You must go to this Jimmie Courduer and tell him about your uncle."

Besides Norah, Manson Towers, and his uncle, Wharton Grahame, with Bert and Roger, there were two men unknown to Doren. After he had identified his uncle, all the prisoners were taken away.

Courduer put a hand on Doren's shoulder.

"Don't feel too badly. We are raiding his office right now, but there won't be any publicity until after the war is over. Come with your wife; we are going to the real cache, open it and leave armed guards."

In two automobiles the party sped to a little hamlet, Beerton, a mile and a half away. Beyond it was a church and a large cemetery that dated back to Colonial times. Here was found

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an enormous stone and steel structure that had been erected by "Tim Smith" in honor of his wife, "Margaret Smith."

This was the secret place indicated inside the talisman. The directions had been changed during the night by the hobbyist Courduer had taken Doren to, and the latter had suggested the ice house as a substitute.

It would have been dangerous to leave the real hiding place in the talisman, for there might be some kind of a slip-up in capturing everyone who knew the secret.

The job of entering the great vault was something like a burglar's job, but finally it was accomplished. In steel cabinets were found many millions of dollars' worth of stocks and bonds the Axis leaders had gathered to use toward a third world war.

Courdeur returned to Doren's bungalow with him and Virginia. He telephoned the message that would be passed along—for an immediate raid on Dr. Leonard's sanitarium.

"I'm sorry you won't be there to see it," he said, "but we can't lose an hour on raids because of the risk of a tip-off."

"The professor threatened he would blow up his invention," commented Doren.

"That will be swell, if only he is considerate enough to blow himself sky-high also. That invention is really more valuable, in a sense, than the millions of dollars' worth of bonds and stocks we seized; for through it many of the war criminals could escape punishment. In changed bodies it would be almost impossible to track them down."

At three in the morning the F.B.I. agent was awakened by a telephone call; he didn't disturb Doren and Virginia, whose wedding night had already been quite hectic enough.

He gave them the news at breakfast. It had been impossible to put through the raid without an alarm. The inventor, true to his threat, had blown up his invention. The fire had spread and the entire top portion of the sanitarium had burned.

There was a secret exit in the cellar. Through this Dr. Leonard and Professor Diettmar had gone, crept to the water and reached a motor launch. It had been pursued, perhaps while trying to reach a German submarine. But the launch had capsized in a quick turn and the drowned bodies of the two men had been taken from the water.

"I think it is time now for you folks to start enjoying a honeymoon."

"So do we," said Doren and Virginia in chorus.

"Certainly you've earned it."

To that they also agreed, and a few minutes later he left them.

They were alone at last, their happiness increased because of the knowledge that the guilty war leaders of Europe would never escape their just doom!

Virginia insisted that Doren ask the F.B.I. for the return of the talisman, once its public use was past.

"Tompkins believed in it—and it worked for him. You made a wish the last time you grasped it, and it has come true, hasn't it, with your love in your arms. And I'm sure it works; I wished everything would come out all right, before I let go of the charm."

Doren agreed with her: Old Pythagoras the magician was a great guy to have on your side!

Personally, of course, he thought Virginia and he could very well take care of the future without a talisman; but after all, you never could tell. . . .

THERE ARE NO PURPLE HEARTS ON BULGING PURSES—BUY WAR BONDS

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GIRL ARTISTS AND THE WAR

IN TIME of war, activities that were once purely for aesthetic and cultural purposes have to be converted to aid the nation's effort. Art has recognized the call to service and has already started its contribution toward Victory.

Demands by war plants for women with art training have become so heavy that they cannot be fully met. A New York art school—the Cooper Union School—has announced that war plants in New York, New Jersey, Texas, and California are employing nearly half their women graduates. And a great many of their women night students are employed during the day in war plants, as well as a considerable number who are on leaves of absence from the school.

Why have war plants chosen these women? What operations in the factory parallel those made by the artist?

Ship and plane production plants employ the majority of the graduates and working students. Drafting and tracing work is predominant. Many aircraft plants want art-trained women personnel as apprentice engineers, painters of plane instruments, and designers of tools, piping layout designs and the like. A Brooklyn plant which manufactures delicate war instruments wants young women to make sequential assembly-like drawings.

Electrical and engineering supply firms draw heavily on women artists, as do telephone laboratories, linotype plants, and various instrument and tool plants carrying war orders.

The Army and Navy, too, are employers of young women with art school training. Art graduates can do map-making, statistical drafting and general drafting in the ordnance division of the Army. Draftswomen are also used in the Army Signal Corps and Army Engineers.

In the Navy, women artists are required for retouching photographs for Navy instruction books, designing naval insignia, and engraving.

Some of the latest work done by women with art training have been the drafting of fuse-settings for munitions plants and silk screen work for tanks, fighter planes, and bombers.

Hardly an occupation hasn't been touched—and changed—by the war. Artists, it seems, won't have to be urged to do their part. They're in it, fighting with the weapons they know best.

HIBERNATION OR MIGRATION?

WHEN winter comes, all animals are confronted with the problem of surviving it. Those animals which could not solve the problem are dead; others that did solve the problem made two different solutions. Some animals migrate, others hibernate.

As we well know, birds migrate. Many birds go thousands of miles in annual trips. Animals cannot do this very easily. A few do migrate, some of them being the bats, the reindeer, the bison and the fur seal. By actual observation it has been seen that the fur seal which breed in the Bering Sea make a complete circuit of six thousand miles each year. The scarlet tanager, a bird, migrates from the northern latitudes down to the Andes mountains of Chile and Peru and back each year. Reindeer on the famous isle of Spitzbergen migrate from the central part of the island to the sea each year since in winter the water does not freeze; the sea keeps the island warm, especially the coast. For a long time it was thought that migration of birds was due to instinct. The idea has been effectively destroyed by experimentation and it is now realized that birds and migrating animals are very sensitive to changes in heat and light so that when it becomes colder and the day shortens they begin their migration. It must be understood that this migration differs from that of salmon and other mating creatures.

Quite another adaptation to the oncoming approach and presence of winter is found in hibernation. Many animals hibernate, the bear being especially renowned for this habit. Not many outward changes occur during hibernation, but many things happen inside the animal. Deprived of a source of food the animal must live on itself, lose most of its fat and usually emerge lean and hungry from its grotto. To conserve, the heart slows up, and breathing almost ceases. It is no wonder that a bear is most apt to attack a man in early spring.

The case of the mouse is most interesting. Its temperature falls to that of the surrounding air, and some may not take a single breath for many minutes. The heart beats at one-tenth the normal rate and there is no pulse. The black bear stops digestion by stopping up its intestines with a mass of pine needless and leaves. Bats hang head down and remain in this position all winter. A similar situation exists in the amphibian family. These animals, cold blooded to begin with, are extraordinarily capable of withstanding the assaults of winter. They burrow into the mud of the bank of a stream, and remain there. If all freezes, they can still live, the only rule being that their hearts must not freeze.

As we know, these are not the only possible adaptations to cold. Man has developed remarkable shelter systems, does not move away and does not sleep through winter. The rabbit increases his muscular acitivity so greatly that he can withstand cold. The fur on some animals grows very much in length and amount so that they need not die from the cold. At any rate, in most cases, the problem has been solved.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE little man paced back and forth across the lush carpeted floor. Occasionally he'd stop to twirl a nearby globe or stroke his jaunty chin, sometimes he'd sit behind his enormous walnut desk; but this wouldn't last long before he'd nervously get up and start pacing again.

"It's an outrage—a damned outrage," he screamed as he paused in front of a wall map of the world. "I, the Great Dornstadt, must sit here day after day with nothing to do. Nothing to do, do you hear?" The little man raged. He pounded his desk. The big room rattled from the effects of his strident voice.

The Great Dornstadt paused long enough to level a finger at his secretary, the man who took much verbal abuse, and the buffer for the little man's terrible tantrums. "Do you realize, Blane, that for twenty years I've been sitting in this seat with nothing to do but rule a few million stupid humans—people who have no right to have minds—people destined to serve me. I'm tired of it—damned tired of it!"

The little man continued to pace nervously back and forth, his hands clasped firmly behind his back. He always did this when he was mad. He knew it made a great impression on onlookers.

"And what do you propose to do?" asked the young secretary.

"Do—do? What can I do, you stupid idiot? I have the whole world under my heel. For twenty years I've been pressing buttons, giving orders, visiting concentration camps—we call them reeducation camps to keep the fools out there happy." He pointed disdainfully toward the window. "By now, Blane, you should know what I want to do—I want to go on another crusade—I want new worlds to conquer—I want new peoples to liberate!"

The Great Dornstadt shouted these words much in the manner of a man talking to a huge audience instead of to one man. His arms flew up and down like a drunken semaphore. His voice was clear and full of deep emotion. His eyes sparkled with eagerness—not the eagerness of a man of fifty-five, but of youth.

"Does not your World Inventors & Scientist Society offer you new hope?" the young secretary offered.

"Bah, those fools," the Great Dornstadt made an ugly face. "They know nothing of any use to me now. Yes, last night I could see Mars and its people through their new telescope—The Great Dornstadt suddenly stopped pacing. He sat down behind his huge desk and thought aloud . . .

"You know—a great world, Mars. Easy to conquer too—if I could get there. That's the problem, getting there. It would be a pushover. They have nothing there—no poison gas, no tanks, no disintegration guns, nothing but canals and stupid fools riding up and down them in foolish-looking boats. They have never felt the Great Dornstadt's wrath. Oh, how I could make them jump at my command! Peaceful, stupid fools now, but after I would conquer them they would all be my servants!"

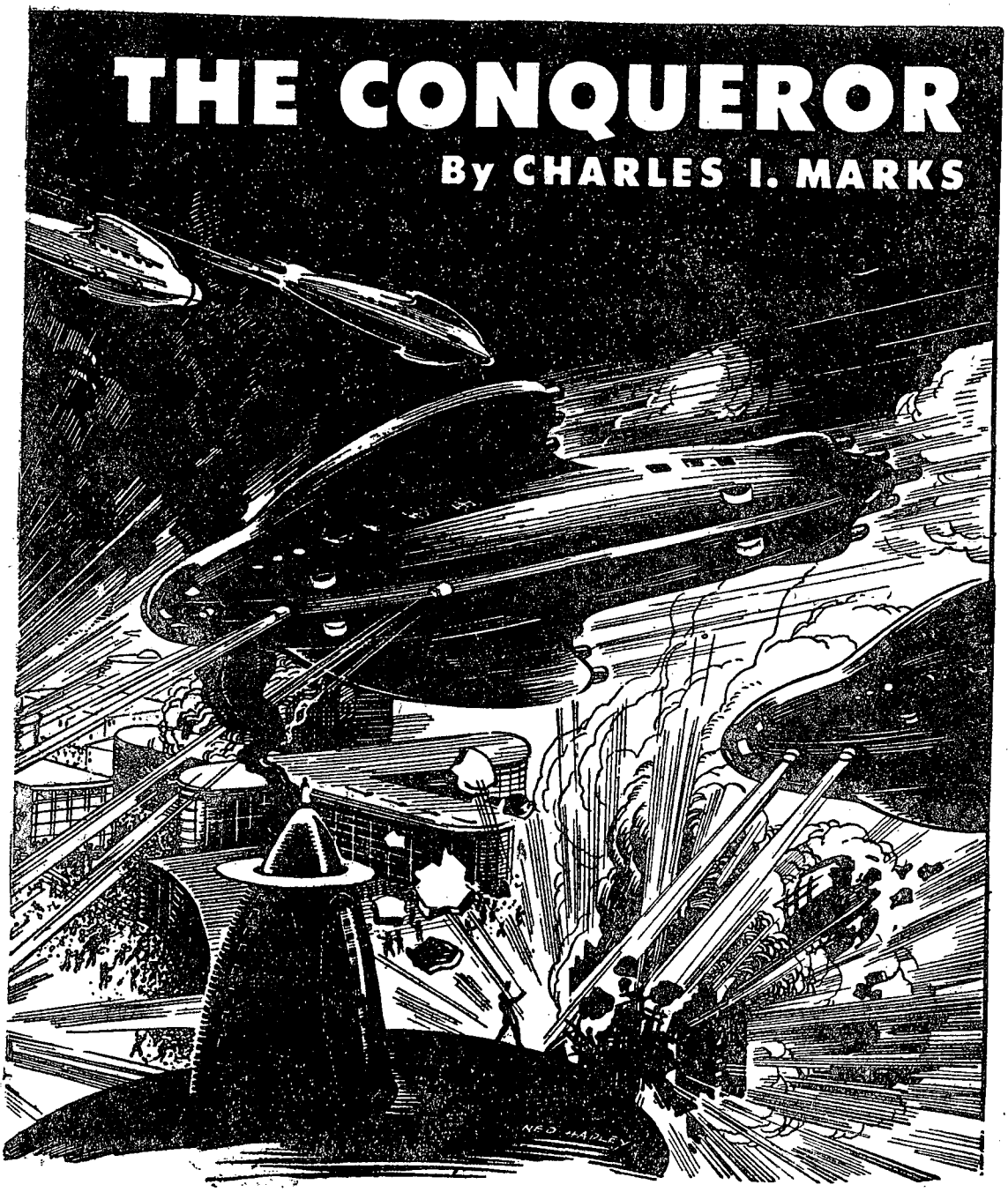
THE little man nodded at his young secretary as if he was nodding at an audience of thousands. Then with mock solemnity he bowed and slowly walked over to his huge desk and sat down with a sigh. Turning to Blane, he continued, "It amazes me to find that there are still in this very world of ours those who do not prefer my methods of liberation." He spoke softly and sat tapping the sharp point of a bejeweled dagger letter opener on the glass surface of his desk.

"For the past twenty years I've ruled

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE CONQUEROR

By CHARLES I. MARKS



The Great Dornstadt looked for more peoples to conquer — and his eyes turned toward the other planets

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this world of ours here. I've ruled it well. There have been no wars, have there?"

Blane nodded in approval.

"Then why are there still groups who wish to rebel against me? Don't I do their thinking for them? Doesn't my planning board see that they have work? Don't they all have food? Clothes? I relieve them of all effort—except that of work. What more could Earth's people want? They should be happy, not rebellious. Don't they have the honor of serving me? It that not enough?"

Blane again nodded in approval. He had heard this speech often, too often.

"Well," said the Great Dornstadt sharply, "what is the business of the day?"

Blane ran a huge hand through his brown hair and handed his master a sheaf of papers. This was a job he hated, but it was part of his work—part of a great game he was playing—playing for keeps.

"Hmmmm, let's see," said the little man toying with the bejeweled dagger and thumbing through the papers. "Same old stuff, see—" He pointed matter-of-factly at one paper. "A fourteen-year-old boy is charged with organizing a boy's club of his own—an upstart leader—a threat to my supremacy at some future day, perhaps. Or a possible threat to the man I pick for my successor.

"You know my policy, Blane. Have him liquidated the usual way; that is, the usual way for youngsters. We don't want to stir up the rebels any more than necessary. You might arrange with the Secret Police for the usual—ah—accident; a fall off a tall building, say." As he spoke these final words, the Great Dornstadt smiled almost pleasantly and emphasized his final words by giving his dagger an extra twirl.

Blane's face was expressionless as he took down the order for the boy's execution. It had been like this for years. For ten years, to be exact, Blane had taken orders from the Great Dornstadt. For years Blane had helped set the wheels of death grinding into motion. At Dornstadt's word he had sent as many as ten-thousand to their deaths in the course of a day. More than once he had been forced to visit mass executions with his master. These weren't pleasant affairs for Blane, but Dornstadt had never failed to enjoy seeing the withering fire of his disintegrator guns blast human flesh and blood into a mere bit of dust.

WATCHING any bit of destructive machinery seemed to give the little man an unaccountable feeling of well-being. Destruction was his tonic, or, more aptly, his drug. Blane easily and vividly recalled the meetings at which Dornstadt and his old cronies, General Rudolph Hiedrich and Karl Siem had gotten together to talk over "the good old days."

The three would visit Dornstadt at his garden estate and sit by the hour in front of his fireplace gleefully gloating over the days when they had surpressed mass uprisings with wholesale slaughters. But Blane had not failed to notice that Dornstadt was rapidly becoming dissatified with Heidrich and Siem. They had lost some of their taste for power. They lacked their old enthusiasm for destruction. They didn't even want to conquer new territories, and this displeased the Great Dornstadt.

Acquiring power had not contributed to the Great Dornstadt's complete happiness, instead it had acted like a drug, like morphine. The more power he acquired, the more he wanted. Blane knew this, and he also knew that his master was nearing a breaking point—

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a breaking point that might end almost anywhere.

Despite Dornstadt's madness, this was the first time he'd ordered the execution of a fourteen-year old boy. Blane could have taken it more calmly had he not known the boy. In fact, he knew him too well. It was the Braddock kid—Mrs. Braddock's young one. Always an upstart, but in a healthy sort of a way. He had bright, blue, eyes; a generous supply of freckles; and a clear, youthful soprano voice that'd ring out, "Hiya, Blane, old boy, how's that Mr. Big you work for?"

Blane was sure the kid meant no harm to Dornstadt, but his master was never one to overlook even the most infinitesimal detail. He could have no usurper, no one who would, or might ever, challenge his rule—not even a bright-eyed kid would be permitted to stand in his way.

For years Blane had taken orders from Dornstadt—orders that had sent more than one of his friends to their death. He knew of the "accident" that killed Tim Shanmark; how he was pushed in front of a rocket *tubetrain*. It was a clever job of faking. Matt Todd's death was a more routine affair. He was simply liquidated along with a few hundred others who were caught attending a world economy discussion. Some of the ideas expressed were a little too original to suit Dornstadt so the problem was neatly solved with a mass liquidation.

Blane had gone to school with these fellows. They were raised in the same neighborhood. They had all taken their military training together, and it was just the breaks that had made Rodger Blane a leader in military science. Blane was a fighter too. A cheek scar was mute evidence of his campaign in crushing a rebellion in the far reaches of Siberia. Mrs. Braddock lost three sons in that campaign. All of them died singing of the Great Dornstadt's name. Blane too sang songs of praise to the Great Dornstadt, but since that time he'd had little reason to sing thusly. Things like an order to execute Mrs. Braddock's third, and last, son made Blane's blood run with hate.

As Rodger Blane sat at the Great Dornstadt's elbow making out an execution order for the death of one Timothy Braddock, his face was hard, firm. It might have even been called ruthless, but inside his heart was pounding in sympathy for Mrs. Braddock. Blane knew he'd have to face her. She'd know he'd helped contribute to her son's death; but she'd dry her tears, shake her grayed head, and tell him it was all in the line of duty for "the cause."

Blane's thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a sharp, spine-tingling laugh. He looked up at the Great Dornstadt, looked into the little man's black, piercing eyes, sunk deep in great cavernous sockets. They reminded Blane of a rat peering at him from the depths of a foul hole.

"Commander Blane, you are a grisly man. Ice must run through your veins." Dornstadt laughed again, louder. "I know you know this kid well; yet you sit there and calmly order his death, just because I tell you to!

"Commander Blane, that's why I like you. You have no feelings. You're cold and calculating. Death means nothing to you. You'll go a long way, Blane. Someday maybe you'll take my place." Dornstadt laughed again, a razor-sharp laugh.

PRECISELY four hours later Commander Rodger Blane sat in a dark, windowless, basement room. Around him, at a dirty, scarred, oak table, sat ten men and a girl—a very pretty girl. She smiled at him pleasantly and tucked

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a stray bit of auburn hair in place as if to improve her appearance for his special benefit.

She looked out of place in that dark, dank, basement room. Her white skin, her manicured nails, her *plascon* clothes, her shapely figure, her perfectly-groomed appearance instantly shouted "Breeding" to anyone who saw her.

But there were others in the room who also looked out of place. Some wore rags, others were dressed in the garb of high World Government officials. In short, the group of twelve represented an adequate cross-section of the peoples of the Earth. In fact, they were in the basement room as the *true* representatives of the peoples of the Earth. They were carrying on a battle, a battle they'd been fighting for twenty years, to let the people have the kind of government they wanted. They were the underground of the year 2500.

Blane had been working with the group for seven years. He'd come to them at the suggestion of Mrs. Braddock. When he was forced to tell her of the death of her two sons in Siberia, he'd broken down and risked his neck by telling her he didn't believe in the Great Dornstadt. She'd gotten him into the underground, and now he knew they considered him a key man.

A single, yellow light cast a somber shadow over the entire group. One man started to speak. He was older, gray-bearded.

"It's been a long, hard pull," he said slowly, "but there are definite signs of progress. Today we have three of our best men in key positions working for the World Government: Commander Blane is personal secretary to Dornstadt—indeed a major triumph for us; and Vance Conrad is with the Secret Police. Both Conrad and Blane have done a fine job."

A younger member of the group started to speak. The old man held up his gnarled hand and nodded as if he knew the answer. "Yes," he continued, "I know about Garson . . ."

The name Garson seemed to fall like a heavy weight on the minds of the little group. They all knew Garson. Blane remembered him as one of the most efficient operators he'd ever known. Garson had wormed his way into the Science & Research Division of the World Government. It had all seemed too good to be true that he should be so close to their confidences. It was just what the social club wanted. They needed plans, science, to fight the Great Dornstadt.

Then something went horribly wrong. Somehow Garson was caught leaving the laboratory with the plans of a new weapon. Garson was one to follow orders and he was told not to touch anything, but to rely on his memory. Blane had told him that himself. Blane also knew Garson was not one to disobey orders, but there were the facts. He had been caught red-handed. He would not talk. And he died.

Not one of the group had commented on Garson's death, but to most of them it did, indeed, seem strange. In fact, it might have been a frame up—Blane thought it possible. Then again, it might have been just carelessness. But the thought of a traitor in their own group seemed impossible. Such a traitor would meet certain death, either from the underground or at the hands of Dornstadt's Secret Police. In this case, one just couldn't play both sides against the middle.

THE old man sat for a moment under the yellow light, thinking. He looked at the eleven faces staring hopefully at him. "Garson," he said, "was a good man, but he disobeyed orders and there

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was nothing we could do to help him—nothing—nothing at all. . ."

The old man slapped his fist on the table, cleared his throat, and continued, "Talking of the past will do us no good. We must get on with some very urgent business of the present." He turned to an elderly, bespectacled man with an extraordinarily long neck. "Dr. Livingstone, head of the underground's research department, has at last been able to give us the secret weapon we've been hunting for—a mighty ship that will travel through space . . ."

In a few moments Dr. Livingstone was able to tell the little group what his invention could do. Not only could it travel through space, but it could carry tons of explosives, be sent against any enemy through a system of robot control. Sent en mass against the Great Dornstadt's strongholds, it could wipe them out with one mighty sweep. On examining the doctor's blue-prints, Blane was able to see that he had really produced a formidable weapon — a weapon that the underground had sought for years. It would mean their salvation, their liberty, after all these years of strife and toil.

"Commander Blane," said the old man, "will you take these plans and see if it will be feasible for us to get this idea into production." He handed Blane the precious blue-prints and curtly adjourned the meeting.

Before Blane could tuck the precious plans into his pocket, Vance Conrad was at his side. He gave Blane a patronizing pat on the back and said, "Hang on to those plans for dear life, Blane, old boy." Blane looked up and saw Conrad smile a crooked smile—almost a smirk, Blane thought.

As Blane stood up, the pretty, auburn-haired girl glided to his side and slipped her arm under his and said, "Come, Rodger, father and I would like to have you spend a few minutes with us before you go." Blane looked down at his fiancee, into her deep, blue eyes and smiled. "I'll be with you in a moment, Elaine."

"You're a lucky man, Blane," grinned Conrad. "Elaine is a wonderful girl—I should know. I too was once engaged to her, but you came along and upset the apple-cart—you romantic devil." For a moment, Blane thought Conrad was trying to be sarcastic. Then he shrugged it off. He'd never liked Conrad and considered any of his opinions concerning the man unfair.

Blane started to leave with Elaine when Conrad suddenly gave his sleeve a slight tug. "Say," he said casually, "didn't I see you with Garson shortly before he was caught with those plans on him?" Conrad looked meaningfully at Elaine as if to gain her favor.

"Yes, you did," said Blane, puzzled. "Why?"

"Well, I just thought you might know something more about just how he came to have those plans on him." Conrad nonchalantly fished a cigarette from a gold case, offered one to Elaine and Blane, and continued: "You were closer to him than anyone, Blane." He blew smoke out of his nose and gave Blane an accusing look.

"Perhaps," interrupted Elaine, raising an eyebrow, "you, Conrad, are a poor loser . . ."

"PERHAPS I am," Conrad said bitterly. "I came from a poor family. I've never had the breaks like you, Elaine Burke, and you, Commander Rodger Blane. Blane's father had money and power—now he's a big shot. Your father, Elaine, rules the underground." Conrad pointed in the direction of the old man who sat talking with a group in a far corner. "You've all had a head start on me, and I'm still

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trying to catch up." His voice was sharp, cringing.

"Don't take it so hard," Blane consoled. "We're all fighting the same battle now."

Still Blane was worried. He had to admit it. Conrad loved power in a manner too much like the Great Dornstadt. He wanted to run the show. If he couldn't, he wouldn't play. That was the way Blane had remembered him in school, and that was the way he seemed to be acting now. It was not enough for Conrad to be on the winning side, but he had to be captain of the winning side. Blane had never thought of him as dangerous, but he often thought he could stand watching. And now he was sure of it.

"Well," Conrad sighed, "what about Garson?"

"I saw him a few hours before he was caught," Blane explained. "He said he had some important news—something about someone in the underground. The next thing I knew he was caught with the plans on him."

"Sure that's all?" Conrad asked brusquely, as if he was interviewing a criminal at the Secret Police headquarters where he worked.

"Yes," Blane replied, looking evenly into Conrad's burning brown eyes.

Conrad seemed to force a smile. He appeared a little relieved about something. He shrugged his shoulders indifferently and left the room.

"Can't see how I ever agreed to marry him in the first place," Elaine said coyly. "I must have been awful young . . ."

"And foolish," Blane added. .

IT HAPPENED early the next morning, much sooner than Blane expected, if he expected anything at all. He was sure he'd placed the precious space ship plans in his desk and locked it. He intended to work on them that night. He wanted to make sure of all the materials, check all the calculations, before he gave the underground his decision. He was a ranking officer. No one, not even a Secret Police officer would dare go into his desk. Yet, it happened. The plans were gone. Someone, an expert, had taken them from his drawer with a pass key of some kind.

Immediately Blane knew what losing the plans would mean. The underground would accuse him of being a traitor. He would be shot, or liquidated by one manner or another, for both Garson's death and turning valuable information over to the enemy. Worst of all, however, he would most certainly lose Elaine. There was the slim possibility that he might come out of this alive, but to come out of it without Elaine would be worse than death itself.

"Blane! Commander Blane! Come in here at once," the *visacall* on his desk blurted. Blane saw the Great Dornstadt's lean face grinning at him from the *visacall's* screen. He pressed a button and replied, "Be right in, sir. . . ."

"Wonderful, Blane, wonderful," Dornstadt pounded his desk and jumped up and down with joy, his black, rat-like eyes beaming with triumph. "These plans you've sent in are what I've been waiting for—a chance to go to Mars, at last!"

Blane's feet felt like huge chunks of ice. An ice-like octopus seemed to be dancing up and down his spine. The Great Dornstadt's long, bony hand was pointing at the plans — Dr. Livingstone's space ship plans — the same plans that minutes before rested securely in his desk!

"I thought you'd like them, sir," Blane managed.

Looking closer he noticed a typed notation saying that Blane had created the idea for his master. He also saw

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where his name had been forged.

This time Blane knew he was truly trapped. If he said anything about the forgery, Dornstadt would make short work of him. He couldn't go back to the underground because they would swiftly liquidate him for turning the precious plans over to their sworn enemy, Dornstadt.

Immeditely Blane knew he had but two choices: He could commit suicide; or he could stall for time and work for a break, something that would clear him. Blane was not the type to commit suicide. He'd go down fighting. He'd always done things that way. Death seemed to him to be an easy solution to a man's problems. It was an all-out solution to every difficulty. You simply put a period at the end of your life and that stopped everything. Such a solution was too easy for Blane.

These thoughts wormed through Rodger Blane's mind as he stood watching the Great Dornstadt fiendishly absorbing Dr. Livingstone's plans. It was obvious that Dornstadt thought Blane had created the plans — Dr. Livingstone, as a precaution, never signed any of his documents. This fact pleased Dornstadt. One of his own aides would make his Martian invasion possible.

"Commander Blane," Dornstadt snapped. "Get to work on this project immediately." He pointed to the plans. "Order our Chief of Construction into an all-out war effort. Every factory, every woman and child must be put to work building at least ten thousand of these ships; munitions; uniforms. We're going to attack Mars!"

Dornstadt jumped to his feet, gave Blane a thumping pat on the back. "I'm going to be the first Earthman to invade the Universe!"

DURING the months that followed, Blane worked feverishly to carry out the Great Dornstadt's orders. Those under him began to see him change. He became ruthless, driving. Day by day he became more and more like Dornstadt. More than once he meted out stiff jail sentences to those who didn't carry out his orders to the letter. When he'd walk through the halls of the World Government's elegant administration building, office boys and stenographers would scurry from him for fear that he'd find fault and order them punished.

When Conrad silkily told Elaine of Blane's treachery, she refused to believe him. But as space ship after space ship slid off the ways and space torpedo after space torpedo rolled one after another from humming factories, the horrible truth of Blane's treachery was too much for her to refuse to believe.

As leader of the underground, Elaine's father urged them all to try to forget Blane and work harder to overthrow a new and more ferocious enemy, an enemy that was a known quantity—a quantity that had plenty of fight.

"The underground," said the old man to his daughter, "is no longer just fighting Dornstadt, but a much more sinister enemy—Dornstadt and Rodger Blane."

The words cut into Elaine's heart like a knife of ice. She still wanted to think of Blane as a tender, kind-hearted man. He'd always been that, fighting and risking his life so that others would have rights. It wasn't like him to change now—now that the battle was so nearly won. She was sure that there must be some mistake. But there wasn't. There were the space ships; torpedoes. You couldn't laugh them off.

That was the way she felt when she said, "Yes," to Conrad. Her heart was made of lead that day and Conrad's words seemed so sweet and soothing that she almost automatically agreed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to marry him. In her depression even the vilest of creatures would have seemed sweet and beautiful. She needed something to cling to, even if it was a thorny branch.

The sole member of the underground who said nothing damaging about Blane, mysteriously enough, was Dr. Livingstone.

"Wait awhile and see," he pleaded. "It is my invention, and I know what Blane can do with it. He is not yet guilty."

But Dr. Livingstone's pleas only made him unpopular with the members of the underground. He was accused of being a traitor and siding with Blane, but his long standing saved his skin. Everyone told him there was enough evidence to convince *them* that Blane was guilty, and should be liquidated immediately.

"Conrad," said the old man at last, "you have been picked to do the job."

"It is as I requested," smiled Conrad. "I know my duty and I'm in a good position to do it. I'll lose no time and do a clean job," he said evenly, patting a slight bulge under his shoulder where his *atomic* gun rested.

BLANE was tired. The day had been long and tedious. Hours he spent going over blue-prints. There were some things he'd trust to no one. Everything must work according to schedule. The attack must be perfectly timed to accomplish its purpose. Dornstadt's Space Armada of thousands of dreadnaughts of the void must get past the Earth's gravitational pull within exactly twenty hours; otherwise the armada would be faced with a definite fuel problem.

Wearily, Blane pressed the keys of the calculator at his elbow. The machine whirred and Blane added another calculation tape to the pile on his desk. He studied the figures for an instant, penciled a few notations, looked at his slide rule, and grinned a pleased grin. His figures checked.

Blane relaxed, pushed his chair back, and took a cigarette from a *lumite* box on his desk. He reached for the lighter on his desk—that is, he almost reached it when on, was suddenly thrust under his nose and ignited.

"Have a light," said a voice smooth as satin.

Blane looked square into the barrel of an *atomic* gun, and behind it stood Vance Conrad, grinning triumphantly.

"Well, Blane," he gloated, "it looks like this time you're on the receiving end." He seated himself on the edge of Blane's desk, shoving Blane's precious papers to the floor.

Blane sat patiently looking at Conrad. Perhaps he'd die in a few minutes, but he'd die knowing who was the real traitor.

Conrad saw Blane's determined expression and purred, "I just thought you'd like to know that the underground has ordered your execution. . ."

"Of course you had nothing to do with it," Blane said sarcastically.

"Now, now, Blane," Conrad said easily, "you must be a good boy . . . you don't have much time to live, you know."

"No last requests?" Blane asked.

"I'll tell you what you're thinking," Conrad offered smoothly. "But I'll add something to it—I'm going to marry Elaine Burke . . ."

Blane winced.

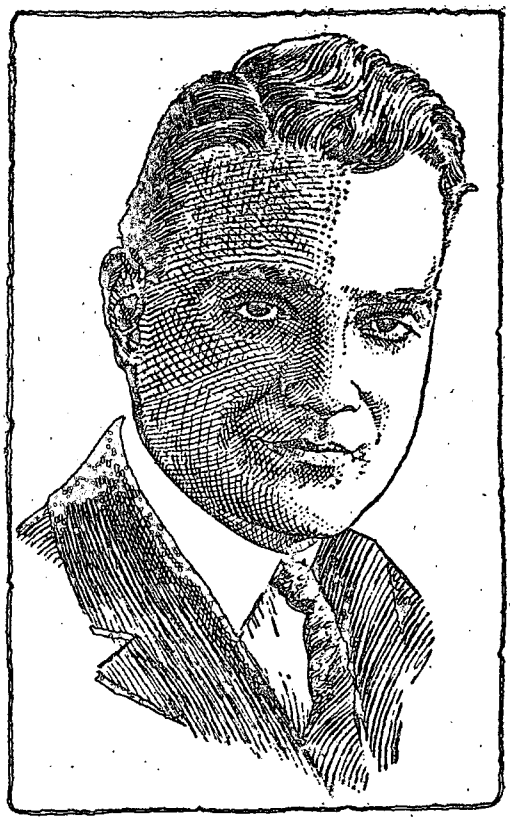
Conrad was pleased. He continued: "You of course know that I've done my little bit. I framed you . . . took the papers out of your drawer . . . gave them to Mr. Big. Neat trick, what?"

"Very neat," Blane snapped impatiently. *(Continued on page 198)*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

»»» Introducing «««

THE AUTHOR



JOHN WILSTACH

IN THE course of a long and varied career, I have read a great number of pieces in answer to the editorial question: "Please sit down and tell me all about yourself?" The answer, often, is either coy or hysterical—as the author hates to admit that he takes himself seriously. Now, it stands to reason a guy is serious about himself, and that even goes for the humorists. But let me get away from too many of the "I" and "Me" stuff by talking about myself in the third person.

John Wilstach, who is getting on now (for the fact that he was in the Navy in the First World War is a dead giveaway), started his so-called career as a reporter on the staff of what was, then, the highest class sheet in this country, the old N.Y. *Sun*, where he rubbed shoulders with Edwin C. Hill and Frank Ward O'Malley, but was only a tiny star himself. The lure of do-re-mi led him to the show business, where he became an advance and press agent, carrying a cane and writing for stars like John Drew, Arnold Daly, Kitty Gordon, Fritzi Scheff, Henrietta Crosman, etc. In New York he handled hits like "Treasure Island" and that biggest of musical comedy hit, "Irene." In between he built up authors with publicity for Harper Bros. of N.Y. and Little Brown & Co. of Boston.

The *Sun* wasn't his last newspaper tie-up—for he did reporting on the *Public Ledger* of Philadelphia, and rewrite on *The Evening Sun* of N.Y.

He messed in movie publicity as an exploitation man for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, in Boston and Detroit, and handled the road tour of "The Thief of Bagdad."

From the time he was a student of Brander Matthews at Columbia U., young (then) Wilstach wrote stories now and again, and once had a yarn in Munsey's at the same time he won a fiction prize from the N.Y. *Herald-Tribune*. But, kiddies, we are going too far back for all except the old folks, so let us bring Wilstach to the time when he started what is lightly called free lancing; which started for a few years with big earnings when Matthew White Jr. of The Argosy thought he was just as good as Max Brand and George Worts. Them were the days. Once he had crime series going in two S & S mags at the same time and got so bloated he took his wife and dog—important in the way mentioned—to London and Paris on Cunarders and returned with a British accent and the need to go to work. It was then William Morrow published his novel "Under Cover Man," which was a hit, and sold to Paramount to star George Raft and Nancy Carroll. He sold a yarn to Fox and took a second trip abroad, more bloated than ever; indeed, by that time a bit insufferable. He thought he was a big shot.

Well, time has a way of taking down the bloat and the head. Wilstach had one ace in the hole; with some of his ill-gotten gains he built a bungalow on Long Lake, in Dutchess County and he still has it—with a nice, steady mortgage. He has been mixed up in lots of mags and books, and with his father wrote "Wild Bill Hickok" that De Mille bought for "The Plainsman."

To get back again, to the first person—I hope you like *Escape From Doom*, which was lots of fun to write—and I believe that the writer must enjoy himself or the reader won't, which is kinda odd grammar but I shall let it stand. Any time you are near Long Pond late in the afternoon drop in, and be sure to bring the makings, for I may be out of 'em. That way we both can't be disappointed.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Concluded from page 6)

QUITE often we point out a feature of our sister magazine, *Amazing Stories,* that might be of interest to readers of this magazine—and last issue was such an instance. We suggested that you pick up a copy of the March issue of AS and read "I Remember Lemuria!" by Richard S. Shaver. We hope you did—because to judge from the fan mail that is coming in, we have something there. You see, we claimed Mr. Shaver's story to be true in the sense that he himself believed it. However, we didn't suggest that your editor believed it too, because we thought maybe you'd think we were pulling your leg. But now, many of our readers are writing in to confirm the main point of Mr. Shaver's story, that the ancient cave cities of Lemuria do exist, and that they are inhabited by dero (degenerate humans) bands who use the antique mechanisms which are still in operating order after 12,000 years to make our life miserable. These machines are thought projectors, television, projecting machines of various kinds, including deadly rays, and in some instances beneficial vibrations which stimulate our senses in various types of physical pleasures. We make no claims, as yet, concerning these letters, but we intend to gather all of them together and attempt to analyze them. Meanwhile, we suggest that you keep "hep" by reading the stories of Mr. Shaver, to be published one an issue in the succeeding five issues (at least) of *Amazing Stories.* Our readers tell us, as an aside, that they are very entertaining from a fiction standpoint, if from no other. How can you miss?

THE other day Robert Bloch came to Chicago, in response to a letter from our associate, Mr. Browne (that gladiator of the morning!) and we wound up playing poker at your editor's home! Proving you never can tell about these writers. And he didn't try to sell us a story. P. S. Lefty Feep won handily . . . off the top of the deck.

READERS keep asking us "Where is Burroughs?" Well, that seems to be a military secret. But it is military, and that's why he isn't writing. We published the last piece he wrote, and we'll publish the next—and that's as much as we can guarantee. Which should be enough!

WE VERY rarely mention the war in this column, nor make predictions (although we hit some pretty amazing marks just after Pearl Harbor). However, we want to say, in passing (and how we hope it will!) that you should keep your eye peeled for what the Germans call the V-4. It was invented in *Amazing Stories* fifteen years, but we won't name it. Hitler took several of our fiction stories seriously in the past (it would seem) and we don't look a dragon in the teeth! But don't say we didn't mention it . . .

A LETTER from David Wright O'Brien comes in this morning's mail. We'll quote a few passages: "I've nothing to report that would pass the censor, and the lurid tales of the combat I've seen to date will have to wait until I'm home and we have a bottle of scotch in front of us. I . . . am now toggling explosives down on the Reich with my own lily white fingers, and enjoying the warmth, in more ways than one, of my fine office in the plexi-glass nose of our B17 . . . Goering's Luftwaffe is not dead, merely dying. It can occasionally be quite a nuisance—to put it mildly—for those of us in the bomber crews when it lashes about in its death throes. The flax guns which formerly had all of Europe to defend have now been pulled back into the Faderland, creating the narsty situation of many more guns to defend far less territory. The Jerry ack-ack boys have been getting so much practice of late that they are becoming distressingly adept at their tasks . . . pleny of scotch at four pounds a bottle . . . the guy who (censored) the cigarette situation—we get four packs a week when we can get them—will be (censored) when he is found . . . contrary to newspaper reports . . . we've got a JOB to do over here." Readers, you all know Dave through his fine stories, and when he hands it out, it's straight. We'd all better get down to business—and we dont mean just war bonds; but at *least* war bonds! Your editor, personally, will never forgive himself if Dave O'Brien stops some of that Luftwaffe lead after this scrap should have been over! Letters like this from your editor's best writers hit home, hard!

BILL McGIVERN is last heard from in Italy, and not enjoying it one bit. Most of our ace writers are in there fighting hard now, and our office has an awfully lonely air about it when we look over our files and see the few manuscripts with their names on them still remaining on hand.

REMEMBER "Oscar, the Martian Detective"? Well, his creator, James Norman, dropped in on us the other day. He's a giant in his uniform and itching to get over there with Dave and Bill. He's scheduled to leave soon.

ARTHUR T. HARRIS is another of our fighting writers recently heard from. He's in a hospital in Florida. Sorry to hear it, Art. But glad to know it isn't worse. We'll be looking for you up to the office one of these days!

JACK WEST still in this country, but now wearing the uniform of a lieutenant. He's doing editorial work for the army! Yes, a man doing what he was trained to do! It's a miracle. And now, it's time to say, "see you next time." *Rap*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

READER'S PAGE

"WILD AND EXTRAVAGANT NOTIONS"

Sirs:

My brother passes his copies of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES on to me, and I am very grateful. Because, since the war, I have not been able to settle down long enough to read. But I am back again, thanks to your magazine. They are very interesting.

As for the mistakes the readers seem to dwell upon: my, my, could they do any better? I think not. Why must there be this eternal criticizing? Have those readers ever looked up the word "fantastic"? Well, I have. It means "wild and extravagant notions." Which are just what the magazine contains!

Now, that letter about malaria, from a member of the Air Corps, was quite interesting. For the information he gave, I am grateful, because that disease has come close to my own family.

Instead of being merely grateful for being here in America, able to see and read these books, some of your readers find time to criticize very small things.

Magazines like yours were printed before all this mess started; may they still be able to carry on afterward, as they are part of the American way.

D. E. POLK,
Philadelphia, Pa.

The right to criticize is also a part of the American way, Mr. Polk; that is why this magazine contains a Readers Page. We like praise—who does not?—but if we printed none but the letters containing that praise, this department would go into a rapid decline. Nothing is more stimulating than an intelligent argument; here's where you find it!—ED.

WILCOX—FIRST AND LAST!

Sirs:

I enjoyed the January, 1945, issue of F.A. The best story, in my opinion, is the "Invasion of the Raindrops," followed by "The Devil's Pigs." Don Wilcox surprised me in the latter story. The first time I tried to read it I gave up, as ordinarily I don't care for tales that jump from one era to another, but this one was very good. The rest were all good except "Taggart's Terrible Turban." Twice, I have tried to read this and each time gave up, so I figure it must not be my type. I also enjoyed the Editor's Notebook, Reader's Page and the articles.

WALTER J. SARGEANT,
3331 DeForest Drive,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Which, if nothing else, proves that Don Wilcox is versatile. We recommend his "Singing Skulls" in this issue as an example of the type of story that is adding to Don's steadily increasing list of fans who look to him for out of the ordinary fantasy.—ED.

FEEP-Y TIME GAL

Sirs:

I have been reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for quite some time and like it very much.

I have one thing to ask. I see you still print stories by Robert Bloch and I'd like to know what happened to the Lefty Feep stories. I missed one copy a while back; perhaps that was the one telling about discontinuing them as I haven't seen any explanation. Each time I buy F.A. I think I'll get to read about Lefty, but am disappointed as usual. So how about the lowdown on this?

I like all your stories, but the best are about interplanetary travel and the description of scenes and peoples of other planets. Also, prehistoric stories.

I save all the pictures on the backs of both F.A. and A.S., along with their stories, and plan to make a book of them when I can get to it.

CLARA HILDRETH,
407 Main Street,
Rolla, Missouri.

Because too much of a good thing can become tiring, we held off on the Lefty Feep series for a time. But during the past two or three months so many letters have demanded his return that Lefty comes back in this issue . . . comes back in a manner that will surprise and delight you.—ED.

RAINDROPS MAKE THE CORN GROW

Sirs:

I have been reading your magazine for over five years, but this is the first time I have ever written you . . . or any other magazine, for that matter.

Your January issue was swell! There is no need to classify the stories according to merit, for all were 100% okay, except the last one which was pure CORN. About "Invasion of the Raindrops," during the whole story the author maintained that Wa-Nee could not talk, but communicated by thought waves. Yet in the last few sentences she is *talking* to Jerry Lane. Could you please explain that?

How about a long novel? Do you have any back issues in stock or, if not, is there any way to order from one of your branch offices?

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MEN

This Horseshoe Ring, Handmade, Hand-engraved, inlaid with simulated pearl, is a KNOCKOUT! Shoe and shank of everlasting Monel Metal is

GUARANTEED 20 YEARS

Supply is limited . . . rush your order! SEND NO MONEY. Pay Postman only $3.85, plus excise tax and postage. Return for refund in five days if not delighted. State size. Address:

AMERICAN JEWELRY CO., Dept. 176-H Wheeling, W. Va.

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 8 x 10 Inches on DOUBLE-WEIGHT PAPER

Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture. Original returned with your enlargement.

57¢

3 for $1.25

SEND NO MONEY Just mail photo, negative or snapshot (any size) and receive your enlargement, guaranteed fadeless, on beautiful double-weight portrait quality paper. Pay postman 57c plus postage—or send 60c with order and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer now. Send your photos today.

STANDARD ART STUDIOS

200 East Ohio Street Dept. 605-B Chicago (11), Ill.

END MISERY!

DON'T LET THE CURSE OF DRINK

drive your loved ones to an early grave or spoil your chances for Money, Happiness, Health. Write to the man who knows how to break the whiskey spell. Write — tell me your problem. NEWTON. Dept. NF2, P. O. Box 861, Hollywood, California.

Gas Pains

25c Home Trial Relieves Excess Acid In 5 Minutes or DOUBLE MONEY BACK

If you still suffer from suffocating gas and heartburn due to excess acid, chances are you've never tried UDGA Tablets. Now make this 25c *double-your-money-back* home trial. Yes, in only 5 minutes the very first tablet may show how you may gain happy relief from gassy excess acid pains. UDGA Tablets, different from "candy" and baking soda, is a real medicine, containing 3 fast-working ingredients. Udga helps relieve in minutes. That's why over 200 million have been used by victims of stomach and ulcer pains, sour upset stomach, indigestion, burning stomach ache, due to excess acid. Ask your druggist for Udga Tablets today.

USED Correspondence Courses

Complete HOME-STUDY Courses and self-instruction books, slightly used. Rented, sold, exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Full details and 92-page illustrated bargain catalog Free. Write now.

NELSON COMPANY

321 So. Wabash Avenue, Dept. 2-23, Chicago 4, Ill.

More stories like the "Devil's Pigs." Please.

You are keeping morale up on the home front, so keep up the good work.

PETER GREENEBAUM,
282 Cabrini Blvd.,
New York, N. Y.

We asked Mr. Benson to explain the point you raised in his story. He tried blaming it on the printer; but we showed him where it read the same way in manuscript form. He's been sulking ever since. These authors are sooooo temperamental. For a long novel we point to John Wilstach's "Escape from Doom" in this issue. Back issues are something we can't help you with during these times.—ED.

FROM AN OLD-TIMER

Sirs:

Here's an old-timer trying to bust your gates. I've been reading F.S. and A.S. for about seven years and enjoy them very much.

In your last issue this is the way I rate your stories:

1. Martian and the Milkmaid.
2. The Tanner of Kiev.
3. Cats of Kadenza.
4. Martian Adventure.

This (1) newcomer is really on the ball. West (2) is good as usual, and (3) Wilcox—hmmm. Hadden and Smith still have the touch of a master; Mac covers are really the best, with J. Allen St. John on the backs. Williams (4) did a very neat yarn. Fuqua and Magarian on interiors were swell, but keep them there. The rest of the stories were just so-so.

ELMER BULLOCK,
A/S USN,
Military Secret,
U.S.A.

CONGRATULATIONS TO WALLACE WEST

Sirs:

In your January issue, loaned to me by an airplane stewardess while on a trip across the continent, I came across a story by Wallace West entitled "The Cannonball Road."

This was by far the best story in your magazine, and if you plan to publish many more like it, I want to be put on your list of subscribers. It was historically accurate, excellently written, and logically plotted. Because of my interest in American Revolutionary history, I would appreciate your sending me the address of the author, as I would like to make available to him additional material relating to the Old Cannonball Road.

As for the rest of the stories in your magazine, I think they were well below the quality of the story by Mr. West. "Year from Tonight," however, was not bad at all.

RICHARD M. BARR,
114-C Larchmont Acres,
Larchmont, N. Y.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If you will address any communication to Wallace West in care of this magazine, we shall forward it to him without delay. For obvious reasons we cannot list his address in our columns. . . . We offer many stories with bona fide historical backgrounds in these pages.—ED.

WANTED: BOOKS BY RIDER HAGGARD

Sirs:

This is going to be a praise and a request letter for you. Praise for your magazine and a request for information on a subject in your last issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

I have long been a fan of fantastic fiction and have tried to add as many such stories to my library as possible. In my collection, I prize my copy of "She" by H. Rider Haggard. I was unaware that this was part of a trilogy as one of your readers mentioned. Now my curiosity has been stirred and I would like to know more about the other two books. Do you have any idea where I could get copies of them? Or, if not, would it be possible for you to tell me anything about them?

I've read both *Amazing Stories* and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for several years. F.A. is my favorite of the two. I only regret that these aren't monthly magazines as they were at one time. Here's hoping they will be that way again, soon.

I've yet to run across a story in your mags that I didn't like in some way or another. True, they aren't all masterpieces, but then a situation like that wouldn't be normal.

The Book Club idea is the greatest thing I've ever heard of. I think it would be an opening for us who like the supernatural to build our libraries up along those lines. A. Merritt's books would go swell in that group, as should Lovecraft, Stoker and ever so many others.

About that "Miracle of Dr. Beaujean" in your last issue: In my opinion it had rather an abrupt ending. Could have been fixed up swell with a couple more paragraphs.

GUY E. TERWILLEGER,
(No address shown.)

We suggest that perhaps your local book dealer can help you acquire Haggard's other books. Or perhaps some of our readers will supply the information you request.—ED.

CAN THIS BE WILCOX?

Sirs:

The best story in the January issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES was by that remarkable, wonderful, interesting, amazing young man, Don Wilcox.

The worst story was by that putrid, lousy hack writer, Don Wilcox.

The above may sound contradictory. The stories of which I am speaking were "The Devil's Pigs," by Don Wilcox, which was the best in the issue; the other was "Taggart's Terrible Turban," by Don Wilcox, which was the worst in the issue.

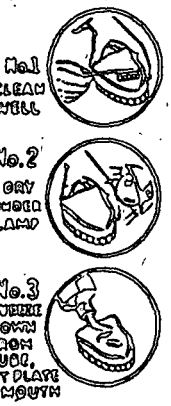
Every time Don Wilcox writes ten stories, nine of them are lousy. Why doesn't he turn out some

Everyone who wears plates will welcome this free offer. CROWN DENTAL CLEANER is an especially prepared antiseptic preparation to keep your plates clean and help eliminate bad breath and foreign substances that collect and cause discomfort.

TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH or NO COST!

HERE'S new amazing mouth comfort without risking a single cent... enjoy that feeling of having your own teeth again. Satisfy your desire for food . . . eat what you want. CROWN RELINER TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH OR NO COST. PERFECT FOR PARTIALS, LOWERS AND UPPERS. Don't suffer embarrassment and discomfort caused by loose dental plates. Apply CROWN RELINER. In a jiffy your plate fits like new and stays that way up to 4 months. No old-fashioned heating to burn your mouth. Just squeeze CROWN from tube and put your teeth back in. They'll fit as snugly as ever. Inventor is a recognized authority in dental field. A patent has been applied for CROWN RELINER to protect you from imitators. After you reline your plate with CROWN, take your false teeth out for cleaning without affecting the CROWN RELINER. CROWN RELINER is guaranteed . . . it's harmless. It's tasteless. Has that natural pink color. NOT A POWDER OR PASTE! DOES NOT BURN OR IRRITATE. If not satisfied even after 4 months return partly used tube for full refund.

JUST 3 STEPS



SEND NO MONEY for CROWN

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

EATS STEAK!

J. Clements of Algonac writes: "My plates were so bad they rattled when I talked. Now I can eat steaks, corn on the cob." E. W. W., of Virginia, writes: "I found Crown Reliner to be all you claim." Many more attest to same excellent results. Reline your plates with CROWN RELINER today.

SEND NO MONEY

You must be 100% delighted or no cost. Try four months and return for refund if not satisfied.

AT YOUR DRUGGIST OR ORDER DIRECT.

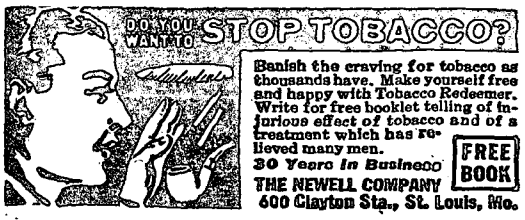
CROWN PLASTIC COMPANY, DEPT. 5002
4358 W. Philadelphia Ave., Detroit 4, Mich.

Send your wonderful Crown Dental Plate Reliner and include the free Crown Cleaner. I will pay postman one dollar plus approximately 24c. postage on arrival. If I am not satisfied after four months, I may return partly used tube for full refund.
(☐ I am enclosing one dollar in payment, same guarantee.)

Name .....

Address .....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



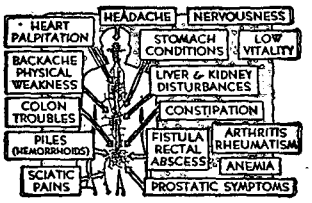
SONGWRITERS

Place your songs with us. Melodies supplied WITHOUT CHARGE by well known Hollywood composers. We record your song and make it presentable to the publishers. Lead sheets and records furnished. Send your song material for free examination. Write for details.

CINEMA SONG CO.
P. O. Box 670 Dept. 8-G Beverly Hills, Calif.

New Facts On Chronic Ailments

Free Book—Explains Dangers Of Piles—Colon Troubles



40-page FREE BOOK explains the causes and effects of these ailments. Write today — Thornton & Minor Clinic, Suite C-202, 926 McGee St., Kansas City, Mo.

THE CONQUEROR

(Continued from page 192)

"But that's not all," Conrad went on, "I'll also arrange it so you'll be blamed for Garson's death. I'll say I found this order on you when I killed you." Conrad put a piece of paper in front of Blane. It was an inter-office communication asking Garson to bring the secret weapon plans to Blane from the Science & Research Division. It was dated the day of Garson's capture. Instantly Blane knew Conrad would be able to pin Garson's death on him once that document carried his signature.

"I saved this especially for you," Conrad continued, placing another sheet of paper under Blane's nose.

more like "The Eagle Man," instead of that stuff he's been writing during the last two years?

Orchids to Livingston for "The Shackled Statue." He picks the strangest people to write about—pencil peddlers, dope addicts and con men.

I was glad to see a Jay Jackson illustration. Where has he been the last few years? The old boy sure brings back nostalgic memories.

The rest of the illustrations were okay, except for the Magarians, whom I don't like. Fuqua is my favorite but he seems scarce as hen's teeth.

I'd like to add my name to the list of those who'd like a science-fiction book club.

ARTHUR COX,
485 Hartford Avenue,
Los Angeles, Cal.

Several manuscripts of Mr. Wilcox's, recently received, indicate that he is turning back to the type of fiction on which he built his reputation with science-fiction and fantasy readers. We are sure that you will like very much Don's "Singing Skulls" yarn in this issue. . . . Livingston's prolific typewriter has turned out many "wrong-side-of-the-tracks" character stories and they will appear in these pages regularly. . . . We have not heard from Jay Jackson in many months; the illustration you mention was one we had in our files for a long time before using it.—ED.

SUGGESTS A BI-MONTHLY

Sirs:

I have just read the January issue of F.A. It's another swell book but lacked the far-off places the October copy had. No interplanetary stories. It is hard to pick a first placer for stories but I suppose it's "Miracle of Dr. Beaujean."

Not so long ago you had 20c copies of F.A. Why not go back to that policy and publish F.A. bi-monthly? Having 140 pages per issue you would still use the same amount of paper you use now. I would like to see F.A. come out every two months.

MILLARD GRIMES,
2307 10th Street,
Columbus, Ga.

Most of the readers of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES *and Amazing Stories prefer the present format of those magazines, and we must be governed by what the majority demand. Actually, it would be a disservice to charge 40c for what formerly sold for 25c. We intend to continue to give quality and quantity despite paper shortages.*—ED.

This column is yours. Write us a letter and we'll print it here. Have your say and get in with the gang. You can praise, you can argue, you can suggest, you can criticise. You're a welcome pal, and the mat's always out—and you won't have to take off your shoes to come in! We're all regular gals and guys.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"This is the original . . ."

Blane saw the same document with Dornstadt's signature on it. "How —?" he started to ask.

"An excellent forgery, don't you think?" Conrad answered. "We of the Secret Police are quite adept at that art . . . I should have little trouble forging your signature to the other document. Naturally, I'll take the trouble to destroy the original. It may—ah—cause some trouble."

"You've done well," Blane admitted. "But perhaps I can save you some trouble. Wouldn't it make your story even more original if the signature on that incriminating document was an original? I'm going to die anyway. Why shouldn't I sign the order?"

"You are most generous, Commander Blane," Conrad said, bowing slightly.

Slowly Blane reached for his pen. It rested temptingly in a marble base at the foot of the only light in the room. Blane took his time, because he wasn't sure that Conrad would fall for a gag as simple as the one he had in mind. His hand closed around the pen, slipped ever so slightly, pressed the light button and plunged the room in total blackness.

A RED tongue of flame spat from Conrad's *atomic* gun. Blane felt the hot rays burn past his cheek. The acrid electrified air stung his nostrils. Swiftly, with panther-like speed, Blane's fist lashed through the air a spot behind the flash. He felt his knuckles dig into soft flesh. He heard a grunt. Something fell heavily, making a dull thud. Then a pair of heavy shoes caught him in the stomach. He felt himself falling, heard a body scrambling up, and a pair of fists started hammering his face.

Conrad was on top of him. Blane felt the huge man's weight pressing against

NEW SULFA DISCOVERY HALTS ITCHY SKIN OR NO COST

At last, the miracle discovery of SULFANILAMIDE is most effectively available to sufferers of ITCHY SORES, ATHLETE'S FOOT, PSORIASIS with PUS INFECTION, and many other externally-caused skin ailments . . . made possible through the discovery of **SULFA SALVEROL**, a smooth ointment put up in convenient and simple form for easy, home use. Greaseless . . . stainless . . . pleasant odor . . . invisible on the skin. No pus-producing germs can live on the skin to which **SULFA SALVEROL** is applied. **SULFA SALVEROL** does not injure, irritate or burn the skin.

QUICKLY ATTACKS:
External
Skin Troubles
CAUSED BY PUS-GERMS IN:
ECZEMA
Athlete's Foot
Dermatitis
Skin Rashes
PIMPLES
ITCHY SORES

A TRUE BLESSING
CONTAINS SCIENCE'S WONDER DRUGS OF THE BATTLEFIELD
SULFANILAMIDE AND SULFATHIAZOLE

SULFANILAMIDE and SULFATHIAZOLE are recognized by the medical profession as a true blessing . . . a genuine gift of medical science and research. All know of the marvelous job they have done in hospitals and clinics, and the miracles performed in saving thousands of lives of our boys in the armed forces. Now the efficaciousness of this great discovery combined with other elements comes to you as **SULFA SALVEROL** to help relieve you of your suffering, discomfort and embarrassment. Imagine awakening the next morning to find rapid improvement taking place and infected areas responding to the powers of **SULFA SALVEROL!** Try it and be convinced at our risk. If it doesn't help, **SULFA SALVEROL** costs you nothing.

FREE *To Try!*

SULFA SALVEROL contains SULFANILAMIDE with SULFATHIAZOLE and other precious ingredients which many skin specialists recognize and recommend. **SULFA SALVEROL** comes to you in ointment form for home use and is not messy or greasy. Does not interfere with your routine . . . day or night. A large size tube has deliberately been priced low so that all may have the opportunity of enjoying the benefits **SULFA SALVEROL** offers. Priced at only $2.00 . . . BUT . . . you must be 100% delighted after 10 days' trial or you can return for full refund of your purchase price. Rush coupon below and start checking distressing, annoying and embarrassing externally-caused sores, at once.

Research Drug Co., Inc., Dept. B-212
100 Fifth Avenue, New York 11, N. Y.

☐ Send me ..... tubes of **SULFA SALVEROL** at $2.00 per tube. I enclose herewith ☐ Money Order; ☐ Check; ☐ Cash for $.....
☐ Send C. O. D. (plus approximately 35c postage). Unless satisfied with results after 10 days' trial, money will be refunded to me in full upon return of tube with unused contents within 14 days from date of purchase.

Name .....
Street .....
City ..... **Zone**..... **State**.....
(Please print or write legibly.)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PRINT ANY PHOTO
on Paper, Cloth, Leather or Wood

SIMPLE, EASY TO USE

Magic liquid takes only 2 minutes to reproduce any snapshot you have on to stationery, handkerchiefs, ties, scarfs, etc. Won't wash off. Won't hurt negative or fabric it's used on. Personalize your belongings! An ideal gift. Complete outfit with full colors included, enough for 100 photos—*only $1.00 postpaid.* Sent C.O.D. for $1.21.

CHRISTY PHOTO SUPPLY,
Dept. 512 2835 N. Central, Chicago

Lemon Juice Recipe Checks Rheumatic Pain Quickly

If you suffer from rheumatic, arthritis or neuritis pain, try this simple inexpensive home recipe that thousands are using. Get a package of Ru-Ex Compound, a two-week supply, today. Mix it with a quart of water, add the juice of 4 lemons. It's easy. No trouble at all and pleasant. You need only 3 tablespoonfuls two times a day. Often within 48 hours—sometimes overnight—splendid results are obtained. If the pains do not quickly leave and if you do not feel better, return the empty package and Ru-Ex will cost you nothing to try as it is sold by your druggist under an absolute money-back guarantee. Ru-Ex Compound is for sale and recommended by druggists everywhere.

Asthma Mucus Loosened First Day
For Thousands of Sufferers

If choking, gasping, wheezing, recurring attacks of Bronchial Asthma rob you of sleep and energy, accept this liberal trial offer. Get **Mendaco**, a doctor's prescription, from your druggist; take exactly as directed and see for yourself how quickly it usually helps loosen and remove thick strangling mucus, thus promoting freer breathing and refreshing sleep. You be the judge. Unless delighted and entirely satisfied with results, simply return the empty package and your money back is guaranteed. Don't suffer another night without trying guaranteed **Mendaco**—only 60c.

LEG SORES

"Nurse Dencker's Home Treatment." This ointment affords soothing and palliative relief for leg sores. FREE TRIAL Does not interfere with daily work. Write for Free Trial without obligation. Thousands of users enthusiastically report favorable results from "Nurse Dencker's Home Treatment." Send today.

Dept. 277-C DENCKER PRODUCTS Long Beach 1, Calif.

LAW

STUDY AT HOME for Personal Success and Larger Earnings. 35 years expert instruction — over 108,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All text material furnished. Easy payment plan. Send for FREE BOOK—"Law and Executive Guidance," NOW!

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 50-N, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

his chest. He gave a mighty shove and quickly rolled over on his stomach—an old wrestling trick he'd learned in college. Slipping his arms under his chest, he pressed them against the floor, raising his back. He felt Conrad lose his hold. He jumped to his feet, saw Conrad in the moonlight that poured from the balcony French windows. He saw Conrad seize a vase. He ducked and heard a loud crash of splintering pottery as the vase smashed into the wall behind him.

Digging his feet into the thick carpet, Blane lunged forward. He caught Conrad in the middle of the stomach and heard him let out a loud grunt. An instant later the two of them went hurtling through the French windows onto the balcony. The entire window broke away in a maze of smashed glass and wood.

"I'll get you—" Conrad sputtered, landing a stinging punch on Blane's jaw.

The blow jarred Blane to the very tip of his heels. But it also jarred him into action. He became mad, raving mad. The energy of a man fighting for his life tore through his veins. He lashed at Conrad with all his might, landing blow after blow and taking blow after blow without seeming to feel them.

But Conrad was a big man, outweighing Blane by at least thirty pounds. And it was this weight that charged at Blane and pinioned him with his back against the balcony railing. Holding Blane in this position, Conrad proceeded to pound him. Blane felt himself growing weaker, weaker. His legs felt like rubber and his arms seemed to have lead weights tied to them. He thought of Elaine, Dornstadt, the underground, the events of the past year. Below him—thirty-three floors below—he would smash into the pavement and all his problems would end.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That thought seemed to be a challenge.

He saw Conrad step back for a final punch. It all was hazy, but he ducked—almost automatically. Conrad had put all he had into the punch. He was traveling rapidly as he flew past Blane and smashed into the railing.

Blane jumped to his feet to take advantage of Conrad's surprise. His fist lashed out. Landed solidly. Again Conrad stumbled backward. This time he hit the railing, his feet flew into the air, and Blane dazedly stumbled forward fast enough to see Conrad falling through space, his arms flailing helplessly at the air. Conrad was no longer a problem.

THE next day Blane was somewhat doubtful when he went in to convince the Great Dornstadt that he killed Vance Conrad because he was a traitor to the World Government.

"When I discovered that Conrad had forged your signature, I naturally became suspicious," Blane lied easily. "I handle everything you sign and I knew you'd never signed an order asking Garson to bring you plans from the Science & Research Division."

Dornstadt sat in his leather chair calmly toying with the bejeweled letter opener. He seemed pleased with Blane. He always liked people who would kill someone for him, and hearing a few added details never bothered him too much.

"Well," Blane continued, watching Dornstadt out of the corner of his eye, "I had Conrad report to my office last night. I accused him of forgery. He attacked me, and I managed to win, that's all." The alibi seemed perfect. Blane had taken pains to destroy the unsigned inter-office communication and any other evidence that might by some chance get him into trouble.

"Why do you suppose Conrad wanted

3¢ A DAY PAYS $100 a Month PAYS YOUR FAMILY $3000

IN SICKNESS AND ACCIDENT

You can collect $100 a month for sickness or accident. $3000 for loss of limbs or sight. $3000 for accidental death. 3¢ a day insures any man or woman, 16 to 75. NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION. Get this policy for 10 days without risking a penny. Send coupon below.

ARCADIA MUTUAL CASUALTY CO.
AMERICAN SENTINEL INSURANCE AGENCY
176 W. Adams St., Chicago 3, Ill., Dept. 723
Tell me how to get your policy for 10-day inspection. No Agent will call.

Name.....
Address.....
City..... State.....

BY WAR BONDS

DRAW for MONEY

BE AN ARTIST!

Trained Artists are Capable of Earning $30, $50, $75 a Week!

Use Your Spare Time to Prepare for a Profitable Art Career! COMMERCIAL ART, DESIGNING and CARTOONING—all in ONE complete home study course. No previous Art experience necessary—we teach you step by step—hundreds have profited by our practical method. TWO ART OUTFITS FURNISHED. Full information in colorful, FREE BOOK, "Art for Pleasure & Profit"—tells all about our course, service, what our graduates say—and commercial opportunities for you in Art.

FREE BOOK gives details!

WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART
Studio 312P, 1115 15th St., N.W., Wash. 5, D.C.
Send me your booklet and full particulars about your course.

Name ..... AGE.....
Address .....
City ..... State.....

Help Kidneys If Back Aches

Do you feel older than you are or suffer from Getting Up Nights, Backache, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Dizziness, Swollen Ankles, Rheumatic Pains, Burning, scanty or frequent passages? If so, remember that your Kidneys are vital to your health and that these symptoms may be due to non-organic and non-systemic Kidney and Bladder troubles—in such cases Cystex (a physician's prescription) usually gives prompt and joyous relief by helping the Kidneys flush out poisonous excess acids and wastes. Get Cystex from your druggist today. Take it exactly as directed and see the results in your own particular case. Under our guarantee unless completely satisfied you simply return the empty package and get your money back. So get Cystex today. Three guaranteed sizes: Only 35¢, 75¢, $1.50 at your druggist.

Cystex
Costs First Citizens

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

do you WORRY?

ABOUT RUPTURE

Why worry and suffer any longer if we can help you? Try a Brooks Patented Air Cushion. This marvelous appliance for most forms of reducible rupture helps hold nearly every rupture securely and gently—day and night—at work and at play. Thousands made happy. Light, neat-fitting. No hard pads or stiff springs to chafe or gouge. Made for men, women and children. Durable, cheap. **Sent on trial** to prove it. Never sold in stores. Beware of imitations. Write for Free Book on Rupture, no-risk trial order plan, and proof of results. All Correspondence Confidential.

Brooks Company, 152-H State St., Marshall, Mich.

Become a REAL ESTATE Specialist

Tremendous opportunities! National Housing Administration Survey reveals 12,600,000 homes needed. Vast shifts of industrial population, government loans to returning veterans, widespread urge to "buy something real," higher incomes on farms, in towns, cities—all mean tremendous expansion in real estate business. Prepare NOW to cash in on big profits. You can learn—in spare time at home. No need to give up your present job. Start in "on the side"—then build up good full time business as your own boss; pleasant outside work, your own working hours.

Our practical home-study course prepares you for this money-making, big-future business. No previous experience needed. Free book describes course—tells how you can quickly learn to make excellent income. Write for free book at once. No cost; no obligation; no salesman will call. *School of Real Estate Training, Dept. 52, 12 East 46 St., New York 17, N. Y.*

WHAT SHOULD YOU INVENT?

Our **FREE BOOK** tells you what today's inventive market wants—how to put down, patent and sell your ideas. Scores of letters in our files attest to the modern demand for inventions—our long experience as Registered Patent Attorneys will help you. Get our FREE book, "How to Protect, Finance and Sell Your Invention." Also special document free, "Invention Record" on which to sketch and describe your invention. Write today. No obligation.

McMORROW & BERMAN, Patent Attorneys
129-A Atlantic Building, Washington 4, D. C.

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"

Help Bring Crooks to Justice Through Scientific CRIME DETECTION!

I have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let me teach you in your own home. Learn Finger Printing, Firearms Identification, Police Photography, Secret Service Methods thoroughly, quickly, at small cost. 58% of all American Bureaus of Identification employ I. A. S. students or graduates. I can prepare you for this fascinating work, during spare time. Write today, stating age, for "Blue Book of Crime."

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 1562, Chicago 40, Ill.

Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home

MEN AND WOMEN, 18 TO 50—Many Swedish Massage graduates make $50, $75 or even more per week. Large full time incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanatoriums, clubs or private practice. Others make good money in spare time. You can win independence and prepare for future security by training at home and qualifying for Diploma. Anatomy Charts and 32-page Illustrated Book FREE—Now! THE College of Swedish Massage, Dept. 5128, 100 E. Ohio St., Chicago 11, Ill.

to get rid of Garson?" Dornstadt asked suddenly and with just a mere touch of suspicion.

"I'm only guessing, of course," Blane gulped, "but I might make a guess . . ."

"Yes?" Dornstadt tapped the keen edge of the letter-opener impatiently on the surface of his large desk.

"I'm only guessing, of course," Blane explained, "but I think Conrad wanted Garson out of the way because he was afraid he knew too much. The two were seen together a lot, and I believe Garson suspected Conrad was a member of the underground—that's my guess . . ."

The Great Dornstadt smiled pleasantly. Blane had seen him smile that way when he'd ordered Tim Braddock to his death. You might have called it his smile of death.

Blane felt his heart pounding, hammering inside of him. Did Dornstadt know the truth? Had the Secret Police been trailing him? Did they know about his connection with the underground? It seemed an eternity before Dornstadt spoke.

"Blane," he said slowly, "I have a surprise for you . . . you may be a bit disappointed . . . but as long as I'm on Earth I run things!" Dornstadt shouted these last words hysterically.

Blane gulped and tried hard to remain cool. He hoped he looked hard and callous.

"In fact, Blane," Dornstadt said coolly, "you aren't going to like what I'm going to say at all—but I'm leaving you behind . . . my boy . . ."

"Behind?" Blane stammered.

"Yes," Dornstadt said with finality. "You will not join me in my Space Armada. I must have some one here to run things while I'm gone—some one I can depend on—you're the man, Commander Blane."

"But—," Blane started to protest.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You stay!" Dornstadt pounded the desk with his fist so hard the room seemed to shake.

TIME traveled fast for Blane. From his office window he could see space ship after space ship lining up in glistening rows at the World Government field. Thousands of men feverishly bustled about loading disintegrator cannon, space torpedoes—designed from Dr. Livingstone's plans—food, fuel, and almost every conceivable type of equipment that would be used to attack Mars.

Turning to the *visacall* on his desk, Blane looked into the face of one of the World Government's announcers.

"All men of the Great Dornstadt's armies must report to their stations for the greatest attack in the history of our great leader's World Government. Not one piece of military equipment can be spared, not one soldier; this must be an all-out fight—our leader has deemed it so. By tonight we must be ready!"

Minutes later Blane saw Dornstadt's image in the *visacall*. His voice was clear and intense. He was at his best. He was going out to attack, to conquer.

"Members of the World Government," he shouted, "we are about to attack. We are about to create history, glorious history! We are to be the first to invade the Universe . . . every one of you will be heroes . . . you will fight, die, for me!"

That evening Blane stood at his office window, a lonely, solitary figure, watching one space ship after another swoosh into the air. Every available bit of war devilment went into the attack—Blane had seen to that. He knew that once Dornstadt reached Mars, that planet would last but a few minutes. Blane had done his job well, but what else had there been for him to do?

One after another the space ships

NO Occupational Restrictions *NOT Contestable
Triple INDEMNITY
LIFE INSURANCE
POLICY PAYS MAXIMUM BENEFITS
$3000.00
Policy Costs Only $1.00 a Month
Provide for those you love this wise, easy way. Only a few pennies a day will pay for TRIPLE INDEMNITY LIFE INSURANCE, backed by Legal Reserves. Old reliable Pioneer Life Insurance Company offers this assured protection without restrictions as to your Occupation, Travel or Residence and includes *valuable Incontestability Clause—all as plainly stated in the policy. Men, women and children from 1 day to 70 years of age eligible. No Red Tape—No Medical Examination! Full details sent by mail. No Agent will call. Write at once for FREE inspection offer. DON'T DELAY!
5-POINT PROTECTION
Pays for LOSS of LIFE due to
1-Natural Causes...
2-All Sicknesses...
3-Ordinary Accidents
4-Auto Accidents...
5-Travel Accidents..
PIONEER LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
8442 Pioneer Building ○ Rockford, Illinois

LOOSE DENTAL PLATES
RELINED & TIGHTENED AT HOME $1.00
JUST BRUSH IT ON
NEWLY IMPROVED DENDEX RELINER, a plastic, builds up (refits) loose upper and lower dentures. Really makes them fit as they should without using powder. Easily applied. No heating required. Brush it on and wear your plates while it sets. It adheres to the plates only and makes a comfortable, smooth and durable surface that can be washed and scrubbed. Each application lasts for months. Not a powder or wax. Contains no rubber or gum. Neutral pink color. Sold on MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE. Not sold in stores. Mail $1 for generous supply, brush and directions and we pay postage. *Charges extra on C.O.D. orders.*
7th Year National Mail Order Sales
DENDEX CO. 2714 S. Hill St. Dept. 82-G, Los Angeles 7, Calif.

Latest Styles
EYE GLASSES
ORDER BY MAIL
10 DAYS TRIAL
NOW ONLY $1.89 A PAIR
MONEY BACK
Guarantee Your money refunded if not entirely satisfied with glasses
Save money by ordering glasses in your own home. Many handsome new styles. Low Prices.
SEND NO MONEY
Just write for FREE CATALOG
Take advantage of BIG money savings. We repair broken glasses. Fill prescriptions.
MODERN STYLE SPECTACLES, INC.
53 W. Jackson Blvd., Dept. 903, Chicago 80, Ill.

TOMBSTONES
DIRECT TO YOU $9.95 UP
T.S. BLAIR 1882 1931
Genuine beautiful ROCK-DALE Monuments, Markers. EASY Satisfaction or MONEY BACK. Freight paid. Free catalog. Compare our prices.
TERMS
ROCKDALE MONUMENT CO.
Dept. 335 Joliet, Illinois

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TALK TO GOD

One year ago I was miserable, deep in debt. Then I discovered an amazing new way to actually talk to God. From that day, my troubles began to fade away. Today I have money, property, automobiles, the luxuries of life. You, too, can talk to God. I will show you how. A letter or postcard to New Life Fellowship, Box *XL*-1429, Hollywood, California, will bring you this amazing message of help, instantly, free of charge.

What To Do For Pains of

ARTHRITIS
Try This Free

If you have never used "Rosse Tabs" for pains of arthritis, neuritis, rheumatism, we want you to try them at our risk. We will send you a full-size package from which you are to use 24 Tabs FREE. If not astonished at the palliative relief which you enjoy from your sufferings, return the package and you owe us nothing. We mean it! SEND NO MONEY. Just send name and address and we will rush your Tabs by return mail. ROSSE PRODUCTS CO., Dept. 198, 2708 Farwell Avenue, Chicago 45, Illinois.

DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men.

30 Years in Business

THE NEWELL COMPANY
600 Clayton Sta., St. Louis, Mo.

FREE BOOK

ANY BOOK IN PRINT!

Delivered at your door. We pay postage. Standard authors, new books, popular editions, fiction, reference, medical, mechanical, children's books, etc. —all at guaranteed savings. Send card now for Clarkson's 1944 Catalog.

FREE Write for our great illustrated book catalog. A short course in literature. The buying guide of 300,000 book lovers. The answer to your Christmas gift problem. FREE if you write NOW—TODAY!

CLARKSON PUBLISHING COMPANY
Dept. NW-45, 1253 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.

POEMS WANTED

For Musical Setting

Mother, Home, Love, Sacred, Patriotic, Comic or any subject. Don't Delay—Send us your Original Poem at once—for immediate examination and FREE Rhyming Dictionary.

RICHARD BROTHERS 37 WOODS BUILDING CHICAGO, ILL.

BUY WAR BONDS

shot into the air, leaving a long tail of orange flame and smoke behind them. Off in the stratosphere he could see Dornstadt's dreadnaughts of the void converging into formation. It was like watching a Galaxy of shooting stars, shooting from the Earth to an apex, a rendezvous, way up in the sky. Within twenty hours they would be well beyond the Earth's gravitational pull. From there they would have to continue on the Mars before they could come back; but on Mars they would have no trouble regravitizing their regenerators and returning to Earth.

Blane sank wearily into the big leather chair at his desk. Now it was just a question of waiting—waiting for the underground to get him. He'd hoped—nay, prayed—that Dornstadt would take him with the Space Armada. It would have been the easiest way out of his dilemma. Now he'd just have to sit and wait for death at the hands of the underground. They'd get him now . . .

As if in answer to his thoughts he heard a commotion in the corridor outside of his office. He heard a scuffle, loud protesting voices from his office guards, the dull thud of a blackjack, and two shots in quick succession. The door of his office swung open.

Blane sat looking into the barrels of two *atomic* guns. Two members of the underground stood grimly holding the weapons; others, weapons drawn, stood about the room . . .

The underground had taken over the World Government!

While he knew that this was his last curtain call, Blane had to admit that he wasn't sorry. After all, the underground was in the saddle and that was what counted.

TO GET a trial was more than Blane had ever expected. But anyone

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who knew the underground and the principles for which it stood would know that justice was a fetish with them. Their creed was to give a man —any man—more than an even break.

Every *visacall* in the country carried the story of Blane's forthcoming trial; but the underground gave both sides of the story. Even then, though, Blane knew what to expect.

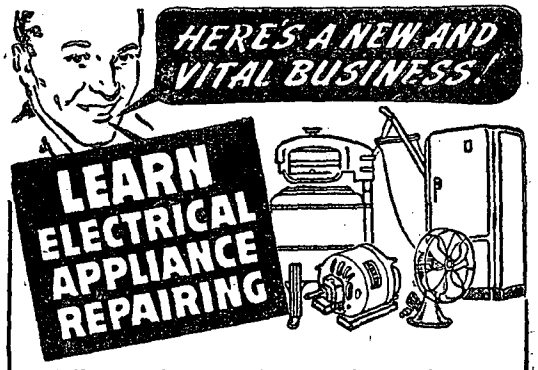
The underground had completely taken over the World Government. The years of oppression had ended, concentration camps were emptied, and many saw the sun for the first time of their lives. But many were hungry for revenge and, to say the least, Blane was not too popular.

The first day of the trial was dark and gloomy. Blane knew he had done his part and had decided not to defend himself, to let the underground defend him. He sat in the defendant's chair, a chair where he'd many times seen men condemned to die for the most trivial of offenses. Now he was in that chair.

He could see Elaine. She seemed prettier than he could ever remember. But her face was pale against her black *plascon* dress. She seemed sad, dreary. Blane smiled at her, but she turned away. Her father took her in his arms and patted her comfortingly on the back.

To Blane the only interesting feature of the trial was the appointment of Dr. Livingstone as his defender. This seemed odd, but Dr. Livingstone had asked to be permitted to defend Blane. "An unusual request," said the long-robed judge, "but inasmuch as you are one of his peers, you have a moral right to defend him."

The prosecuting attorney wove a web of damning evidence around Blane. He was accused of murdering both Garson and Vance Conrad. Members of the audience booed him every time he en-



Offers Big Money—Independence

If you are mechanically inclined—can hold and use tools it will pay you to learn electrical appliance repairing. Operate from your garage, basement, etc. Work as many hours as you wish—the appliance repairman is his own boss. On many types of repairs it is usual for a repairman to charge on the basis of $5.00 to $8.00 an hour!

No Previous Experience Needed

Profusely illustrated our new course shows you in simple, easy to understand language plus drawings and photographs, how to make each repair on refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, motors, fans, irons, etc., etc. Explains and gives you a working knowledge of electricity, welding, nickel plating, etc. Shows you how to build the power tools you need and how to solicit and keep business coming to you. Not a theory course but an honest to goodness practical course written by and used by repairmen the country over. Price of course is so low that the savings on your own household appliances will pay for it. Act NOW! Send today for FREE literature. Christy Supply Co., 2836 N. Central Ave., Dept. D-112, Chicago 34, Illinois.

10K GOLD RINGS
GENUINE DIAMONDS

These Rings contain Genuine Diamonds, mounted in solid 10K yellow Gold. We offer a 10-day trial—satisfaction or your Money Back! For a limited time only — $5.95 each or the "Bridal Pair" Only $10.95 plus 20% tax. Send No Money — when your Rings arrive, pay postman. Act Now! Genuine Diamonds, solid Gold rings. Gift box free.

VICTORY DIAMOND CO.
Dept. NF-2, Saint Clairsville, Ohio

ITCH
CHECKED IN A JIFFY

Sufferers from the torturing itch caused by eczema, pimples, scales, scabies, athlete's foot, "factory" itch, and other itch troubles are praising cooling, liquid **D. D. D. Prescription.** This time-proved medication—developed by Dr. D. D. Dennis—positively relieves that cruel, burning itch. Greaseless and stainless. Soothes and comforts even the most intense itching in a jiffy. A 35c trial bottle proves its merits or your money back. Ask your druggist today for **D. D. D. Prescription.**

High School Course at Home **Many Finish in 2 Years**

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-239, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

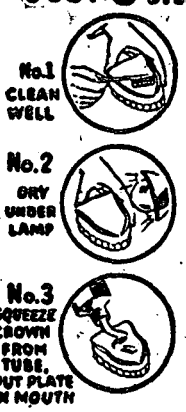
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Everyone who wears plates will welcome this free offer. CROWN DENTAL CLEANER is an especially prepared antiseptic preparation to keep your plates clean and help eliminate bad breath and foreign substances that collect and cause discomfort.

TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH or NO COST!

HERE'S new amazing mouth comfort without risking a single cent... enjoy that feeling of having your own teeth again. Satisfy your desire for food . . . eat what you want. CROWN RELINER TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH OR NO COST. PERFECT FOR PARTIALS, LOWERS AND UPPERS. Don't suffer embarrassment and discomfort caused by loose dental plates. Apply CROWN RELINER. In a jiffy your plate fits like new and stays that way up to 4 months. No old-fashioned heating to burn your mouth. Just squeeze CROWN from tube and put your teeth back in. They'll fit as snugly as ever. Inventor is a recognized authority in dental field. A patent has been applied for CROWN RELINER to protect you from imitators. After you reline your plate with CROWN, take your false teeth out for cleaning without affecting the CROWN RELINER. CROWN RELINER is guaranteed . . . it's harmless. It's tasteless. Has that natural pink color. NOT A POWDER OR PASTE! DOES NOT BURN OR IRRITATE. If not satisfied even after 4 months return partly used tube for full refund.

JUST 3 STEPS



SEND NO MONEY for CROWN

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

EATS STEAK!

J. Clements of Algonac writes: "My plates were so bad they rattled when I talked. Now I can eat steaks, corn on the cob." E. W. W., of Virginia, writes: "I found Crown Reliner to be all you claim." Many more attest to same excellent results. Reline your plates with CROWN RELINER today.

SEND NO MONEY

You must be 100% delighted or no cost. Try four months and return for refund if not satisfied. **AT YOUR DRUGGIST OR ORDER DIRECT.**

CROWN PLASTIC CO., DEPT. 1702
4358 W. Philadelphia Ave., Detroit 4, Mich.

Send your wonderful Crown Dental Plate Reliner and include the free Crown Cleaner. I will pay postman one dollar plus approximately 24c postage on arrival. If I am not satisfied after four months, I may return partly used tube for full refund. (☐ I am enclosing one dollar in payment, same guarantee.)

Name .....

Address .....

tered the court. And through the entire testimony Dr. Livingstone said nothing. Blane watched member after member testify against him. Even Elaine told of his spat with Conrad, and how Conrad had told her of his turning over Dr. Livingstone's precious plans to the World Government.

The prosecutor handled the case like a jig-saw puzzle, placing every bit of evidence in its proper place until he had a complete picture of Blane's treachery.

AT LAST Dr. Livingstone asked him to take the stand. He got Blane to tell of Garson's death. He had handwriting experts analyze Dornstadt's signature. In fact, he cleared Blane of everything but treachery—the very thing Blane cared about. The jury obviously was convinced that he had intentionally turned Dr. Livingstone's plans over to Dornstadt. To make matters worse, Dr. Livingstone took this point of view too.

Then Dr. Livingstone put his cards on the table. He gave the jury a final blast—a blast they'd never forget . . .

He had huge charts wheeled into the courtroom and, from carefully drawn plans, he drew his final conclusion.

"Gentlemen of the jury," Dr. Livingstone began rather awkwardly, "you take this man for a traitor—I'd call him a national hero . . ."

A gentle murmur rippled through the courtroom. There were "aw's" and "ah's." The prosecuting attorney scowled. Blane's face was blank. Elaine suddenly looked hopeful.

"Everyone in this courtroom dreads the day when the Great Dornstadt returns—as you inevitably believe he will—but the only man who has made it certain that he won't return sits here in this court accused of treachery to a world he loved better than his life!"

A sudden pall of silence fell on the courtroom. Spectators leaned anx-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

iously forward, trying to catch Dr. Livingstone's every word.

"Commander Rodger Blane was willing to give his life so you could again have freedom!" Dr. Livingstone continued. "Had he gone with Dornstadt on his Space Armada, he would have never returned to Earth!

"But more important, the Great Dornstadt will never return to this Earth. All of his war machinery is gone. The underground rules. Peace and liberty are here again. There is not even a threat of war—all because of one man—a man who has literally remade the world!"

The jury leaned forward in anticipation. Dr. Livingstone took off his glasses, slowly cleaned them, and continued, "By the surest conclusions of mathematics, Rodger Blane and I both *knew* that once Dornstadt got beyond the Earth's gravitational pull—twenty hours after taking off—he would never return alive!"

"He must first reach Mars, regravitize the ships' regenerators, before he can return. Dornstadt *must* reach Mars before he can return to Earth!" Dr. Livingstone's fist hit the jury guard railing an emphatic thump.

The members of the jury looked skeptical.

"Blane," Dr. Livingstone continued, "handled all the calculations. He let no one in on his plans. He alone knew the time schedule. He alone sent Dornstadt and his war machine into limbo . . .

"Dornstadt will never reach Mars alive! much less return to Earth! Traveling at the top speed of which my space ship is capable—it was intended only for travel immediately beyond Earth's atmosphere—it would take Dornstadt's fleet thirty years to reach Mars—*if he had gone at the right time! and the right direction!* As it is, Blane

(Concluded on page 209)

BEGINNER EARNS $1,819.00

"Today I received a check for $165 for a story. Another I sold for $34. Not bad for a beginner, is it? The other day I counted up just how much I made previously. It amounted to $1,620.00."—Mrs. L. L. Gray, 579 E. McHarg Ave., Stamford, Texas.

Why Can't You Write?

It's much simpler than you think!

SO many people with the "germ" of writing in them simply can't get started. They suffer from inertia. Or they set up imaginary barriers to taking the first step.

Many are convinced the field is confined to persons gifted with a genius for writing.

Few realize that the great bulk of commercial writing is done by so-called "unknowns." Not only do these thousands of men and women produce most of the fiction published, but countless articles on business affairs, local events, homemaking, decorating, fashions, hobbies, etc., as well.

Such material is in constant demand. Every week thousands of checks for $25, $50 and $100 go out to writers whose latent ability was perhaps no greater than yours.

The Practical Method

Newspaper work demonstrates that the way to learn to write is by writing! Newspaper copy desk editors waste no time on theories or ancient classics. The *story* is the thing. Every copy "cub" goes through the course of practical criticism—a training that turns out more successful authors than any other experience.

That is why Newspaper Institute of America bases its writing instruction on the Copy Desk Method. It starts and keeps you writing in your own home, on your own time. And upon the very same kind of *actual assignments* given daily to metropolitan reporters. Thus you learn by *doing*, not by studying the individual styles of model authors.

Each week your work is analyzed constructively by practical writers. Gradually they help to clarify your own *distinctive style*. Writing soon becomes easy, absorbing. Profitable, too, as you gain the "professional" touch that gets your material accepted by editors. Above all, you can see constant progress week by week as your faults are corrected and your writing ability grows.

Have You Natural Ability?

Our Writing Aptitude Test will reveal whether or not you have natural talent for writing. It will analyze your powers of observation, your imagination and dramatic instinct. You'll enjoy taking this test. There is no cost or obligation. Simply mail the coupon below, today. Newspaper Institute of America, One Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y. (Founded 1925)

NOTICE TO CANADIANS

Newspaper Institute's operations in Canada have been approved by the Foreign Exchange Control Board, and to facilitate all financial transactions, a special permit has been assigned to their account with The Canadian Bank of Commerce, Montreal.

Free

Newspaper Institute of America
One Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y.

Send me, without cost or obligation, your *Writing Aptitude Test* and further information about writing for profit.

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss .....

Address .....

(All correspondence confidential. No salesman will call on you.) 41-B-595

Copyright 1944 Newspaper Institute of America

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JET-BOAT of TOMORROW

By HENRY GADE

In the jet-propulsion motor and the gas turbine new fields for motive power in water travel are opened

(SEE BACK COVER)

HUNDREDS of new inventions have come out of the research that has been stimulated by the requirements of war, and many of them obviously point the way toward a complete change in the way mankind will live in the immediate future. This new way of life will be a drastic change over the way he would have lived had there been no war. This would seem, on the surface, to be an argument in favor of war as a stimulator of progress and an urge to advancement of civilization; actually, it is an indictment, but we do not propose to go into that now except to say that the new method of water travel depicted so ably by artist James B. Settles on this month's back cover is a scientific advancement which can come only with peace, although it is an outgrowth of war—because a war-torn world gives us no opportunity to use any mechanical advancement of our civilization which inevitably would have come anyhow.

Therefore, here is a wonder invention that could add greatly to Man's comfort, entertainment, efficiency, and knowledge . . . withheld because the principles of its operation are being used instead in death-dealing bombs and rockets and dive bombers. It is a jet-propelled speed-liner for ocean travel which would make crossing the Atlantic on the water as easy as crossing a small lake in a speedboat.

This jet-boat of tomorrow could easily carry two hundred persons, together with baggage, from New York to London in slightly more than eight hours; or at the speed of the fastest of modern cargo-passenger aircraft.

Because of the short transit time, this ship need not have the tremendous bulk of an ocean-liner. It does not need all of the facilities of a ship which requires days to make the trip. There is no need of cabins in which passengers must sleep, with all the attendant space-eating facilities. There is no need of large facilities for dining rooms or galley. The interior of this ship is no more complicated than the interior of a modern streamliner of the rails.

Also, a great saving in weight and space is effected by the elimination of giant motors. The jet-propulsion motor is a marvel of space economy, and when combined with the gas turbine, becomes a source of tremendous and continuous power using a fuel which is the least bulky of all fuels.

The jet-boat is constructed on purely streamlined principles, a long, tapered cigar-like shape, with a minimum of air-resistance protuberances. It is steadied by narrow plane surfaces on each side which keep it level and true on its course, and aid in overcoming the surface tension of the water by reducing the area of contact through the provision of a controlled "lift." Otherwise there are no controls beyond a retractable rudder and a "feathered" keel.

The motor operates on the familiar principle of air taken in by forward vents, mixed with the explosive fuel, subjected to compression, then exploded and ejected through a compression jet tube at the rear of the ship, propelling it forward through a process of reaction.

This motor is highly efficient, and when in high-speed operation is almost 100% efficient, thus eliminating the flame and smoke of the rocket, and producing a smooth, perfectly controlled "jet" of energy-filled gases which are almost invisible. At top speed, this type of motor seemingly has no limits, except those of friction, and a very safe speed of approximately three hundred miles per hour could be attained. Much greater speeds are possible, but the speed mentioned here is suggested as a safety factor beyond the possibility of error resulting in accident.

Since there is no vibration in the operation of a jet-propulsion, gas turbine motor, the ship would rush over the water as smoothly and as silently as a bob-sled down a snowy slope. The only sound would be the weird rumble characteristic of the jet stream. Passengers in this ship would be unable to observe any sensation of movement beyond that offered them by their vision. The sea-scape outside would flash past as a blur of water that would seem absolutely frozen.

Prepared lanes of travel would have to be laid out, and navigation would be a matter of proceeding along arrow-straight lines. These lanes would have to be kept clear of other surface craft and rigidly policed. All in all, the jet-boat would be the smoothest ride Man has ever invented . . . and it's probably not too far in the future.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE CONQUEROR
(Concluded from page 207)

purposely plotted a course that *looks* the shortest, on paper; but in space, a straight line is not the shortest distance between two points, especially when they are rapidly moving points such as Earth and Mars. When the fleet gets to where Mars is now, *Mars will be more than 227,000,000 miles away from that spot,* on the other side of the sun!

"Ladies and gentlemen, Dictator Dornstadt was a great militarist—but never before has a militarist planned an attack on a *moving* point, a point which is moving at speeds beyond all human comprehension—and being *only* a militarist, he couldn't have known that! But Rodger Blane knew it; and he was willing to sacrifice his own life in the process of ridding the Earth of Dornstadt and his killers!

"We can be eternally grateful that he did not entirely succeed!"

A sudden roar of applause shook the courtroom. Even the prosecuting attorney rushed over to Blane, and joyously shook his hand! Dr. Livingstone had won! Blane had won! The underground had won! The world was free again!

Blane stood on his toes, tried to see Elaine. He could see nothing. Then he felt a tug at his arm. He looked down a bright face smiling up at him . . . Elaine!

"You've won more than just a court case, darling," she said happily. Blane smiled back, took her in his arms, felt her warm body next to him, and pressed his lips to hers. They were soft and welcoming. Wheels spun, lights blinked, his blood felt warm and good. The crowd cheered lustily, but Blane didn't hear a thing.

LEMURIA: OLD AND NEW

76,000 Years of Human History

Easter Island, Malden, Tinian, Figi, Ponape, Hawaii—do these ancient centers of civilization incite your imagination and cause you to wonder as to the source of the common culture, architecture, and language which characterizes the peoples and places of the Pacific South Seas? If so, you will want to read the story of the "Lost Continent," the "Lost Empire," and the "Lost Race" as told in our introductory booklet "LEMURIA THE INCOMPARABLE." Not only will you learn that civilization started in this Pacific area as far back as 74,000 years B.C., but you will be shown evidence that there will be some day a restored Lemurian Continent in the Pacific. A "New Earth," a "New Order," and a "New Race" are not only possibilities; they are inevitabilities. Be sure to read "LEMURIA THE INCOMPARABLE." 60 pages illustrated with facts and figures of unusual importance. Send one dime today. No obligation. Write Dept. U.

LEMURIAN FELLOWSHIP
118 N. Larchmont Blvd. Los Angeles 4, California

If Nature Sleeps

Take O.S.R. Tablets. If you lack PEP, ENERGY, VITALITY and don't have natural desires for fun and good times, if you suffer from aches and pains, coated tongue or bad skin, this all may be due to faulty elimination. HELP NATURE with O.S.R. TABLETS—pure herbal ingredients grown in nature's garden. CAUTION: take only as directed. O.S.R. Tablets help men and women get relief from faulty elimination—relief that helps you to love life again! SEND NO MONEY—(send just your name and address) pay postman $1.35 for a BIG box of 180 O.S.R. Tablets. Or send only $1. NOW and SAVE 35c. HEALTH IS POWER—WRITE TODAY! STANDARD REMEDY CO., Dept. Z, Baltimore 2, Md.

RHEUMATISM
• ARTHRITIS — NEURITIS •
Get Mendenhall's Number 40 from your druggist or by mail postpaid for $1.25. Money back if first bottle fails to satisfy.
J. C. MENDENHALL MEDICINE CO.
Evansville, • • Indiana

ROCKET TO THE MOON! SOON!

Wartime Developments in Rocket Technique Point Way to Post-War Inter-Spacial Rocket Adventure!

Join United States Rocket Society, Inc. A nation-wide organization of service men and technicians of all kinds who are determined to see that our Country wins the RACE TO CONQUER SPACE! Send 25c for informative application. Keep in the advance ranks of progress! United States Rocket Society, Inc., Box 29, Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Mental Telepathy

Learn Powerful Mental Telepathy in One Lesson. 5,000 Word Booklet $.25 "Moonlight." Joe E. Johnson, Jr., 912 Benton, Nashville 4, Tenn.

Photos

PRETTY GIRL PHOTOS. Large selections $1. Judy Sellers, Box 123, Terre Haute, Indiana.

BUY MORE WAR BONDS

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

UNSUSPECTED POWER

The Mysterious Influence In The Air You Breathe!

THE SOUL OF THE UNIVERSE is in the air you breathe. Deposited in your blood—with each inhalation you take—is *the intelligence* that directs the course of the planets through the misty reaches of space, and the strange phenomenon of life itself.

What is it that causes your heart to beat, your lungs to expand and contract? What mind directs *the cells* of your being, each in their purpose—some to create bone, others tissue and hair? What *consciousness* pervades these vibratory *globules of life* and gives them awareness of their Cosmic function?

Are you one of the millions who have looked *beyond yourself* for some external Divine Power or agency? Have you searched in vain for some outer sign or word of Divine assurance when in doubt or in need? Now learn of the *unsuspected power* that exists in every simple breath—and that becomes *part of you.* The ancient Egyptians believed that the essence of life was borne on the wings of the air. The Bible proclaims that with the first breath man becomes not just an animated being—but a *"living soul." Try this experiment,* and prove a Vital Life Force exists in the air. When you are in pain or despondent take a deep breath. Hold it as long as comfortable—then notice the momentary relief.

This Amazing Free Book

Would you seriously like to know how to draw upon this Intelligence of the Cosmic, with which the air is permeated? You can use it to awaken the creative powers of your mind, and for making life an experience of *achievement.* Use the coupon below for a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how in the privacy of your home *you may learn* to use these simple, useful, *natural laws.*

USE THIS GIFT COUPON

Scribe H.D.E. The Rosicrucians (AMORC)
Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California

I am sincerely interested in learning how to use the mysterious influences of the universe in the betterment of my life. Please send me a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life."

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

Rosicrucians are NOT a religious organization

THE ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC) SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

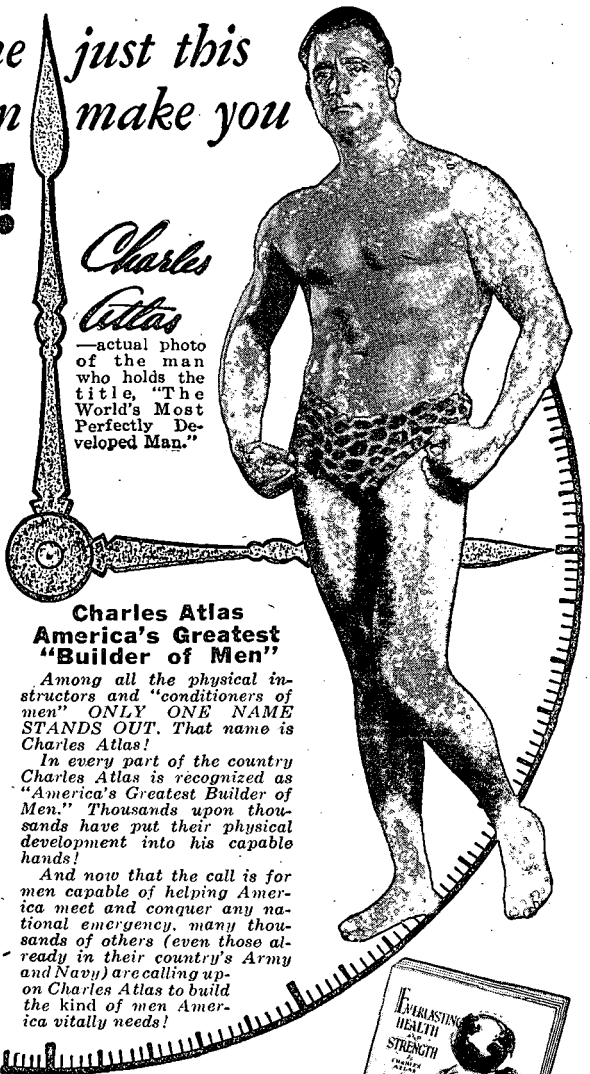
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

15 Minutes a Day!

Give me just this and I'll prove I can make you

A NEW MAN!

I'M "trading-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind," and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making NEW MEN of them. *Right now* I'm even training hundreds of soldiers and sailors who KNOW they've got to get into shape FAST!



Charles Atlas —actual photo of the man who holds the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

Only 15 Minutes a Day

Are you ALL MAN—tough-muscled, on your toes every minute with all the up-and-at-'em that can lick your weight in wildcats? *Or do you need the help I can give you*—the help that has already worked such wonders for other fellows, everywhere?

All the world knows I was ONCE a skinny, scrawny 97-pound weakling. And NOW it knows that I am the holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." How did I do it? How do I work miracles with the bodies of other men in only 15 minutes a day? The answer is *Dynamic Tension*, the amazing method I discovered and which changed me from a 97-pound weakling into the champion you see here!

In just 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home, I'm ready to prove that *Dynamic Tension* can lay a new outfit of solid muscle over every inch of your body. Let me put new, smashing power into your arms and shoulders—give you an armor-shield of stomach muscle—strengthen your legs into real columns of surging stamina. If lack of exercise or wrong living has weakened you *inside*, I'll get after that condition, too, and show you how it feels to LIVE!

Charles Atlas America's Greatest "Builder of Men"

Among all the physical instructors and "conditioners of men" ONLY ONE NAME STANDS OUT. That name is Charles Atlas!

In every part of the country Charles Atlas is recognized as "America's Greatest Builder of Men." Thousands upon thousands have put their physical development into his capable hands!

And now that the call is for men capable of helping America meet and conquer any national emergency, many thousands of others (even those already in their country's Army and Navy) are calling upon Charles Atlas to build the kind of men America vitally needs!

FREE *This Famous Book That Tells You How to Get a Body that Men Respect and Women Admire*

My book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength,"* tells you exactly what *"Dynamic Tension"* can do. And it's packed with pictures that SHOW you what it does. RESULTS it has produced for other men. RESULTS I want to prove it can get for YOU! If you want to learn how you can actually become a NEW MAN, right in the privacy of your own home and in only 15 minutes a day, then man!—get this coupon into the mail to me as fast as your legs can get to the letter-box! CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 92, 115 East 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 92
115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength."*

Name.....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address.....

City..... State.....

☐ Check here if under 16 for Booklet A.

Buy War Saving Bonds and Stamps regularly.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JET-BOAT OF TOMORROW The newest bal
science is the jet propulsion motor. Germany has used it in her robombs; but here we see it
future peacetime use, as the motive power of a super, ocean-going speedboat. (See page

DIGITAL ARCHIVES
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED